THE FEMALE ENTHUSIAST: NINETEENTH-CENTURY WOMEN AND THE POETICS OF INSPIRATION

Rachael Isom

A dissertation submitted to the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of English and Comparative Literature.

Chapel Hill
2019

Approved by:

Jeanne Moskal

Janice Hewlett Koelb

Laurie Langbauer

Eliza Richards

Beverly Taylor

ABSTRACT

Rachael Isom: The Female Enthusiast: Nineteenth-Century Women and the Poetics of Inspiration
(Under the direction of Jeanne Moskal)

By tracing the evolution of the female enthusiast across generic and disciplinary boundaries, this project enacts a postsecular rethinking of women's writing about inspiration and genius in the first half of the nineteenth century. Enthusiasm's religious inheritance lent authority to Romantic-era women in a literary marketplace skewed toward masculinized expressions of feeling, but linking their writing to prophetic zeal also compromised its legitimacy. Departing from early female Romantics' more politicized claims to rhetorical power, many second-generation women aimed to renovate enthusiasm by emphasizing its association with feminine restraint and by linking it to a safer version of female genius: the Italian tradition of improvisation most famously exemplified in fiction by Germaine de Staël's *Corinne, or Italy* (1807). Women writers avoided the condemnations often hurled at their literary foremothers, and at Methodists and Jacobin radicals, by marrying these religious and secular enthusiasms. But combining the *improvisatrice* model with the heretical prophetess had costs of its own: in attempting to wed these two discourses by supplementing religious vocabulary with secularized poetics, these women often lost their most apparent claim to self-authentication under the historical category of Christian enthusiasm. My dissertation charts important successes, failures, and complications in this development of female enthusiasm across the 1820s and 1830s in order to reevaluate the professionalization of women's inspired poetics in the Victorian age.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project has been the work of many hours, but it would not exist without the support of so many generous minds and hearts. I hope to thank a small number of those here.

First, the faculty in English at Murray State University helped me discover this field I love and provided me with training to pursue it. I owe special thanks to Barbara Cobb, Timothy Johns, Danielle Nielsen, and Kevin Binfield for supporting my application to the Ph.D. program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. To Kevin, in particular, am I indebted for guiding my early efforts in conducting primary research on Romantic-era women's writing.

Several fellowships and institutions have been instrumental in realizing this project. I am grateful for the Graduate Innovation Assistantship from the Provost's Office at Murray State, as well as the Evan Frankel Dissertation Fellowship from the Department of English and Comparative Literature at UNC. The Department also funded my participation in a course on "The Eighteenth-Century Book" at Rare Book School, where I learned from Michael Suarez and Mark Dimunation about print culture (especially political cartoons) related to my interests. I thank the staff of UNC's Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library—especially Emily Kader and Liz Ott—for sharing their expertise and their stellar nineteenth-century holdings. Looking forward, fellowship support from the New York Public Library, the Armstrong Browning Library, and the Huntington Library will be invaluable as this project grows.

I also want to recognize the many generative conversations that have shaped my ideas. The International Conference on Romanticism and the British Women Writers Conference, along

with meetings of the North American Victorian Studies Association and American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, hosted trial runs of many chapters. At UNC, I thank the faculty in English and Comparative Literature—especially Inger Brodey, Florence Dore, Heidi Kim, Clayton Koelb, Tim Marr, Megan Matchinske, Tom Reinert, Kim Stern, James Thompson, and Joe Viscomi—for coursework, conversations, and feedback that have informed my scholarship.

It has been my greatest privilege to work with the amazing women scholars who have not only fostered my ideas through service on my committee, but who have also become role models in this profession. From her Victorian Poetry course my first semester at UNC to her guidance on the last chapter of my dissertation, Beverly Taylor has eagerly shared her expertise. She and Laurie Langbauer wrote many references for fellowships that are crucial to this project's development. I thank Laurie, also, for the opportunity to learn from her in the classroom as a Teaching Assistant and Graduate Research Consultant. To Jan Koelb and Eliza Richards I am grateful for sharing knowledge that helped me consider this topic's connections to other national literatures and poetic genres. Every meeting with this committee was a thoughtful, productive conversation about my research. I can't imagine a more supportive group.

The foremost advocate of this project and of my career has been my director, Jeanne Moskal. After all, this dissertation began as a conference paper I wrote for her course on Mary Shelley. Jeanne patiently guided me in transforming that paper into an article, and that article into what is now my second chapter. But Jeanne's influence far surpasses the work of these pages. Through her outstanding mentorship, I have learned to relish the moments when authors flout my expectations, to value well-crafted prose and the skillful editing behind it, and, perhaps most importantly, to appreciate the humanness of our work and of the people who do it. For these lessons and so many more, I thank Jeanne as my teacher, my mentor, and my friend.

The work of these past six years would never have been possible—or nearly so enjoyable—without the encouragement of dear friends. I'm grateful to Suzanna, Sarah, and Doreen for sharing materials that helped me find my way. I thank Michele and Katie for providing feedback on an early version of Chapter 3. I cannot thank Vera enough for sharing models and citations, reading multiple chapter drafts, and lending her ear to many nascent ideas that eventually made it into this document. To Dwight I'm grateful for hours of caffeinated co-working, pages of thoughtful feedback, and one rain-soaked half marathon to remind us that grad school isn't the only difficult thing we've attempted. And finally, to the group of remarkable women with whom I've shared a home and a career over the past six years—to Mary, Katherine, Ani, and Kimmie—I am forever in awe of your brilliance as scholars, your ingenuity as teachers, and your generosity as friends. Thank you for sharing all of these with me.

My sister, Morgan, has been a constant source of positivity, energy, and assurance. My parents, Becky and Jimmy, have provided unfailing support since before I can remember, but I date their enthusiasm for my writing to the fictional female biography I composed in the fourth grade. (We all should have known I'd research women writers someday.) From that time, their confidence has sustained me when my own has faltered, and for that I am ever grateful.

Finally, I owe my deepest debt to John, though he is far too generous to call it debt at all. As my chief interlocutor and perpetual encourager, he has seen me through every stage of this endeavor (and many others) with a patience bordering on the superhuman. As a musician, he has taught me about improvisation in ways that theory simply couldn't. And as my partner and best friend, he has filled this time in our lives with inspiration, with love, and with a great deal of fun.

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CHAPTER 1: ROMANTICISM AND THE PARADOX OF FEMALE ENTHUSIASM

Writers of the British Romantic Period inherited a complicated discourse of enthusiasm. Prior to denoting excitement or fandom, "enthusiasm" signified an individual's special access to divine knowledge and expressive power, a peculiar set of abilities that often elevated the enthusiast in the role of poet, prophet, or seer. By the eighteenth century, however, Britons' estimate of enthusiasm had deteriorated along several interrelated lines—religious, philosophical, political, and literary—that compromised its respectability, in large part by feminizing it. As enthusiasm grew to accommodate the religious fervor of Methodism, the secular ardor of French radicalism, and the spontaneous inspiration and emotion that have conventionally defined High Romantic poetics, it compounded those movements' rhetorical powers but also their social consequences for literary production. By the turn of the century, enthusiasm had become a catchall term for uncontrolled and unsavory feeling, and being marked as an "enthusiast" could compromise a writer's authority apart from any particular religious affiliation. The label proved especially fraught for women authors, as the cultural phenomenon of enthusiasm perpetuated damaging stereotypes of feminine hysteria and hyper-emotionality. Across the first half of the nineteenth century, women writers continued to reinvent the figure of the female enthusiast, and to critique her resemblance to her literary grandmothers: the prophetess, the *improvisatrice*, and the poetess. By collecting these disparate identities, the figure of the Romantic-era "female enthusiast" represented both a challenge and an opportunity for

many second-generation Romantic women writers to address their social relationships to religion, emotionality, and literary ambition.

This introduction traces two key trajectories of enthusiasm's connotative pejoration in the British imagination before previewing four women's strategies for refashioning the female enthusiast in light of this shift. Through a cultivated distrust of heterodox religion and a fear of French radicalism—both popularly associated with feminine emotion— the enthusiast's reputation became damaged by the turn of the century, and these prejudices help explain the issues Romantic-era poets and novelists faced in authorizing their work. Male Romantics recognized the power and danger of feminine emotion, and they worked to sanitize it for their own poetics; in doing so, they left women writers with enthusiasm's negative associations and with little option to safely reclaim the term. Thus, for many Romantic-era women, the female enthusiast became at once standard-bearer and target of critique. As these writers constructed their own enthusiast protagonists and speakers, they often avoided overt identification with them; some waged measured critiques, lauding the female enthusiast's abilities but lamenting her social degradation. As this dissertation will demonstrate, these women's diverse belief structures and genre preferences resulted in a variety of responses to the paradox of female enthusiasm, but their primary strategy for ameliorating female enthusiasm was to meld it with more socially acceptable avatars of feminine genius. Instead of reprising their foremothers' overtly religious or political claims to inspired power, second-generation women infused female enthusiasm with the safer, more secular alternative of Italian improvisation. With uneven success, this precarious marriage of prophecy and improvised poetry authorized feminine voices against a Romantic narrative that had marginalized them as hysterical, irrational, and unprofessional. In her triumphs and tragedies alike, the figure of the female enthusiast embodies the many ways that women

managed the rhetoric of strong feeling in order to construct feminine inspiration as both natural and otherworldly, personal and professional: a thoroughly Romantic kind of genius.

I. Postsecularism, Feminism, and Re(-)viewing Enthusiasm

Enthusiasm as a concept, like the emotional state it describes, was anything but stable during the years leading up to the Romantic Period. So, in order to reexamine the term's rich history in the eighteenth century and its impact on British women writers in the nineteenth, my dissertation layers onto its historicist approach two other theoretical lenses—feminism and postsecularism—which have recently helped scholars rethink women's conceptions of self in relation to individual religious beliefs, and to the complicated gender norms that emerge from them. For decades, rhetoric echoing from the pulpit and the academic lectern alike placed feminist principles and religious devotion at odds; even now, many religionists suspect feminism of undermining traditional theological values, and feminists look askance at dogmas that seem irredeemably paternalistic. But close attention to women's lives and, as I hope to show, to women's writing, refutes this simplistic binary. Indeed, many feminist scholars have embraced the burgeoning postsecularist movement in critical theory, which challenges the long-accepted thesis that religion loses its relevance to modern, secularized societies. Philosophers like Rosi Braidotti have argued persuasively that "agency, or political subjectivity, is not mutually exclusive with spiritual values."[1] Indeed, many belief systems that we tend to associate with

[1] Rosi Braidotti, "Conclusion: The Residual Spirituality in Critical Theory: A Case for Affirmative Postsecular Politics," in *Transformations of Religion and the Public Sphere: Postsecular Publics*, ed. Rosi Braidotti, Bolette Blaagaard, Tobijn de Graauw, and Eva Midden (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 251. See also Rosi Braidotti, "In Spite of the Times: The Postsecular Turn in Feminism," *Theory, Culture & Society* 25.6 (2008): 2, 9; Eva Midden, "Towards a More Inclusive Feminism: Defining Feminism through Faith," in *Transformations of Religion and the Public Sphere: Postsecular Publics*, ed. Rosi Braidotti, Bolette Blaagaard, Tobijn de Graauw, and Eva Midden, (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 210-27, esp. 211; Pamela Sue Anderson, *Re-visioning Gender in Philosophy of Religion: Reason, Love and Epistemic Locatedness* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 46, 49-50; and Bolette Blaagaard, "Gender or Discrimination: Rethinking the Cartoon Controversy," *Historica* 2.30 (2007): 13-19. Colin Jager makes a similar claim about Romanticism, arguing that its literature "deterritorialize[s]"

repressive gender norms—including the forms of Christianity that predominated in British Romantic culture—also helped authorize women's voices and constructions of agency.

Re-centering women's belief as crucial to conceptions of the artistic self exposes the limitations of dependence on a presumed Enlightenment secularism and helps us recognize how women's spiritual leadership efforts often supported powerful—if qualified—claims to gender equality. As Bolette Blaagaard observes, "secularism and the Enlightenment have strong ties to Christianity," and "only forgetfulness" allows critics to presume a "strict opposition between a religious 'them' and a secular 'us.'"[2] My project enacts a remembering of those eighteenth-century links among Christianity, Enlightenment, and feminine agency via the discourses of female enthusiasm that emerged and developed in their wake. This historical view of women's poetic inspiration reveals the influence of religious texts and challenges an assumption all too common among Romanticists: that secularity indicates superiority. Rather, for the daughters and granddaughters of Mary Wollstonecraft, religious belief strongly informed—or even begot—articulations of literary agency, especially as it was figured through the female enthusiast during the first half of the nineteenth century. As my four case studies show, women's literary conceptualizations of femininity were inextricably—and, I argue, productively—tangled up in their relationships to scripture, religious institutions, conversion, and skepticism. Moreover, enthusiasm's cultural and etymological shifts help explain women's eagerness to graft onto the enthusiastic prophetess the more secular, literary trend of improvisation. The examples of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, Letitia Elizabeth Landon, Maria Jane Jewsbury, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning help us understand how nineteenth-century women's writing variously reinforced,

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discourses based on "secular arrangements of power" and "contemporary religious revivalism" (*Unquiet Things: Secularism in the Romantic Age* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015], 29).

[2] Blaagaard, "Gender or Discrimination," 13, qtd. in Midden, "Towards a More Inclusive Feminism," 213. See also Braidotti, "In Spite of the Times," 3.

critiqued, and reimagined Romantic-era gender politics via the female enthusiast. Moreover, their regulating of female enthusiasm through the overlapping principles of feminism and Christianity shows how the period's complex discourses of restraint governed women's self-presentation.

In light of significant shifts in enthusiasm's meaning—denotative and connotative—over the last three centuries, a brief philological discussion helps to historicize the concept and explain how the constellation of ideas surrounding it anchors a postsecular feminist reading of women's authorial agency during the Romantic period. In present-day usage, "enthusiasm" typically denotes excitement, and the personal noun form, "enthusiast," is often synonymous with "fan." It usually requires a modifier or indirect object to complete its meaning: as in a Broadway enthusiast, or an enthusiast for political reform. These present senses of enthusiasm as "intensity of feeling," "passionate eagerness," or "intense conviction" generalize more specific historical meanings.[3] In the eighteenth century, enthusiasm carried particular religious significance through association with divine inspiration and spiritual devotion, which artists expanded to include the raptures of producing and experiencing poetry, music, and visual art. Obsolete definitions from the *Oxford English Dictionary* show links to inspired composition: enthusiasm could denote "[p]ossession by a god, supernatural inspiration, prophetic or poetic frenzy; an occasion or manifestation of these." The idea simultaneously housed activity and passivity, control and abandonment, and, most importantly, religious and secular notions of these paradoxes. As such, enthusiasm allowed for considerable fluidity in usage; however, the word saw a general pejoration in the British imagination during the eighteenth century as respectable writers and religionists became wary of its links to heterodoxy, radicalism, and madness. This

[3] "Enthusiasm, n," *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), accessed January 9, 2017; http://www.oed.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/view/Entry/62879?redirectedFrom=enthusiasm#eid; hereafter cited parenthetically as *OED*.

distrust appears in Samuel Johnson's dictionary, which defines enthusiasm as "a vain confidence of divine favour or communication" (qtd. in *OED*). Johnson dismisses enthusiasm as a product of personal "ego" rather than supernatural possession, and he includes in that delusion religious and secular misapprehensions of inspired feeling.[4] Its inspiration was thought to be "[f]ancied," its religious feeling was considered "[i]ll-regulated or misdirected" (*OED*), and, accordingly, its reputation was rapidly deteriorating in polite circles well before the start of the Romantic period.

If "enthusiasm" connoted false inspiration and dangerous feeling by mid-century, then its personal noun form received an even greater blow to acceptability because it named the being deluded enough to believe such ecstasies. Skepticism and disdain appear across definitions from the period. Whereas "enthusiasm" means "possession by a god," "enthusiast" signifies "[o]ne who is (really or seemingly) possessed by a god" (*OED*). Even if the feeling seems legitimate, the human body that feels it cannot be trusted so easily. Any prophet, poet, or preacher might be a "visionary," but they could also be a "self-deluded person" (*OED*). This uncertainty about the enthusiast depends on the skepticism surrounding self-authentication, which made "personal experience . . . the basis of identity and knowledge,"[5] especially for women without access to formal education. As opposed to Enlightenment philosophy's reliance on external sources to ascertain truth, the enthusiast drew his or her own truth from within, from inspiration unknown and unknowable to anyone but the individual. Thus, the moniker carried at once connotations of mysterious power and certain error, transcendence and madness, the possibility of true revelation and the arrogance to trust anything suggested to one's own mind. For most eighteenth-century Britons, to be an enthusiast was to place oneself above the realm of the rational and, for women,

[4] See Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 10-11.

[5] Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 6, cf. 28, 37.

above the patriarchal authorities of establishment religion and monarchical power. Thus, British Methodism and French philosophy alike fostered a version of female enthusiasm that gave women new access to leadership, but these roles were never secure, and were quickly demonized through popular association with religious figures like the prophetess Joanna Southcott and political radicals like the assassin Charlotte Corday. These legacies contributed to the general distrust of enthusiasm during the Napoleonic Wars, and they made it especially difficult for Romantic-era female enthusiasts to escape damaging imputations of heresy and radicalism.

II. British Methodism and the Distrust of Zeal

Connoting presumed divine contact and bold self-authorization, enthusiasm became a catchword for heterodox expression, both individual and institutional, in eighteenth-century Britain. But how did enthusiasm descend so far in popular opinion during the pre-Romantic period? What were its dangers, and who were the "enthusiasts" that embodied them in the British imagination? One answer is Methodism, which validated individual emotion through extempore lay preaching and personal, ecstatic conversion experiences. As Phyllis Mack emphasizes, Methodists also advocated habits of introspection to control their own enthusiastic "wildfires," but their hyperemotional public meetings and printed conversion narratives meant that enthusiasm took precedence over these more staid faith expressions in the British imagination.[6] Methodism thus became the face of New Dissent and of dangerous religious zeal in the 1750s and afterward, despite John Wesley's concern about enthusiasm and his desire to remain within

[6] Phyllis Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment: Gender and Emotion in Early Methodism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 18. For Methodist self-control, see Mack, *Heart Religion*, 14-15, 18, 25-26, 38, 50, 133-36, 177, 240, 278; Misty G. Anderson, *Imagining Methodism in Eighteenth-Century Britain: Enthusiasm, Belief & the Borders of the Self* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 35; and David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 52. For Methodism's presumed enthusiasm, see Anderson, *Imagining Methodism*, 35, 37, 49-50; Jennifer M. Lloyd, *Women and the Shaping of British Methodism: Persistent Preachers, 1807-1907* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2010), 19; Hempton, *Methodism*, 33-34; and John Kent, *Wesley and the Wesleyans: Religion in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 5-6. Mack calls Methodism the eighteenth century's "most successful movement of religious enthusiasm" (*Heart Religion*, 26).

the Anglican establishment.[7] His opponents continued to view Methodists' nontraditional practices as evidence of political misalliance, religious corruption, or personal insanity.[8]

In a culture also steeped in Enlightenment philosophy and pseudo-medicine, these ocular proofs were highly pathologized as symptoms of physical and psychological ailments. Methodist enthusiasm—like most expressions of religious zeal—was aligned with constitutional instability, and was thus characterized by nervous symptoms like fevers, weeping, trembling, and delirium.[9] It was also figured as an "infectious" disease,[10] which contributed to the idea of enthusiasm as social contagion and of the enthusiast as its carrier. Anglicans distrusted these unorthodox expressions of belief; they thought "only the delirious enthusiast was so committed to the self-sufficiency of his or her persuasion that he or she could abandon the tried and tested institutions of the Church."[11] By going off-script, so to speak, and by making the physical body the theater of spiritual devotion, Methodist preachers and converts seemed to elevate personal experiences to the level of scripture. For example, Wesley's *Arminian Magazine* printed exemplary conversion narratives, many by women whose "occasional, fragmentary states of ecstasy seem to have

[7] See David Hempton *The Religion of the People: Methodism and popular religion c. 1750-1900* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 78-85; and Mack, *Heart Religion*, 37, 45.

[8] See Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 16, 214-15; and G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 268. For imputations of enthusiasm to other Dissenting religious leaders like Joseph Priestley, see Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 14-15, 27-28.

[9] See Jasper Cragwall, *Lake Methodism: Polite Literature and Popular Religion in England, 1780-1830* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2013), 6; Andrew O. Winckles, "'Excuse What Difficiencies You Will Find': Methodist Women and Public Space in John Wesley's Arminian Magazine," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 46.3 (2013): 415-29; Mack, *Heart Religion*, 4-5, 16; Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 28-29; Susan Juster, *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 38, 102; and Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*, 268.

[10] Cragwall, *Lake Methodism*, 76. See also Juster, *Doomsayers*, 28-30.

[11] Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*, 14.

offered the basis for a new self-regard."[12] While not the norm for most Methodist women,[13] these instances of emotive self-authorization unsettled more orthodox Christians, who preserved the status quo at the cost of enthusiasm's reputation.

Many opponents of the sect used its disproportionately female constituency to discredit it. Women outnumbered men in many eighteenth-century Methodist congregations, perhaps because of the increased latitude offered for leadership through private exhortation and, in some cases, for public preaching.[14] Methodist men were also feminized via the medical gendering of hysteria; ministers in particular were figured as "'unmanly'" because of their feminine sensibilities and presumed sexual appeal to throngs of female followers.[15] Contemporaneous Satiric prints encapsulate this line of critique and demonstrate its cultural reach. For example, Hubert François Bourguignon Gravelot's *Enthusiasm Display'd: or, The Moor-Fields Congregation* (1739) denigrates Methodist enthusiasms by caricaturing the popular preacher George Whitefield (1714-1770).[16] Set outdoors in allusion to the much-derided practice of "field

[12] John Kent, *Wesley and the Wesleyans*, 108, cf. 106, 116. See also Anderson, *Imagining Methodism*, 69, 78-79; Winckles, "'Excuse What Difficiencies You Will Find,'" 415-29; Mack, *Heart Religion*, 60-82, 88, 91, 148, 180, 186, 288-89; and Juster, *Doomsayers*, 63.

[13] See Mack, *Heart Religion*, 25.

[14] Barker-Benfield specifies that, between 1750 and 1825, 55-70% of British Methodists were women (*The Culture of Sensibility*, 272). These statistics are contested, but critics agree about the central reasons for women's interest in Methodism: that women outnumber men in most religious organizations, that Methodism's emotionality was linked with women already, that the sect provided greater gender equality, and that doctrines of self-improvement supported women's domestic management. See Anderson, *Imagining Methodism*, 77; Hempton, *The Religion of the People*, 180-82; Mack, *Heart Religion*, 21; and Lloyd, *Women and the Shaping of British Methodism*, 36.

[15] Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*, 77, 25. See also Anderson, *Imagining Methodism*, 112; Lloyd, *Women and the Shaping of British Methodism*, 3, 28; Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 15, 35; and Susan Juster, *Disorderly Women: Sexual Politics & Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 5.

[16] See Figure 1: Hubert François Bourguignon Gravelot, *Enthusiasm Display'd: Or, The Moor Fields Congregation* (London: C. Corbett, 1739). Library of Congress, PC 1–2432. I thank Mark Dimunation and Michael F. Suarez for introducing me to this print during a 2017 Rare Book School course on "The Eighteenth-Century Book." See also Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*, 77, 272. For Whitefield's enthusiasm, see Juster, *Doomsayers*, 78.

preaching,"[17] the design places a gesticulating Whitefield atop a pile of women gathered to hear his "Sighing" and "Screech[ing]." The young female listeners' hypocrisy and hypersexuality appear in their masks, Janus-heads, seductive glances, and scandalously bare shoulders. Even the title, *Enthusiasm Display'd*,[18] characterizes Whitefield's Methodism as a superficial faith, which the accompanying poem labels it as mere "Pretence" and "the Pest of common sense." Thus, despite Wesley's insistence on Enlightenment principles,[19] polemicists latched onto the feminine emotionality of preachers like Whitefield and their converts. They used Methodism's femininity to discredit its enthusiasm and, in turn, to sideline its female preachers.

William Hogarth's *Enthusiasm Delineated* (1762) drops the hallmark outdoor setting but intensifies the superstitious iconography to further feminize Methodism and ridicule its female members.[20] While male figures dominate this later design, the positioning and behavior of its two prominent women again link femininity with hypersexuality and hysteria. The woman in the lower right-hand quarter seems oblivious to any religious ceremony (however irreverent) and instead leans toward her lover, gazing upward into his eyes as he reaches into the bosom of her dress. These two hide amid more ghastly spectacles, including the unconscious woman in the lower left-hand corner. Her rosy cheeks suggest fever; she may have been overcome by religious

[17] For "field preaching" as a Methodist stereotype, see Cragwall, *Lake Methodism*, 84, 86; and Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 183.

[18] A later print also entitled *Enthusiasm Displayed* (1756) offers a less critical view of Methodist field preaching. While it likewise depicts a crowd surrounding an elevated preacher in an outdoor scene, it lacks Gravelot's imputation of scandal. See Robert Pranker after John Griffiths. *Enthusiasm Displayed* (London: John Griffiths, 1756); British Museum, 1880,1113.5043, accessed July 30, 2018, http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=3266815&partId=1&searchText=enthusiasm&page=1. See also Anderson, *Imagining Methodism*, 85-87.

[19] See Anderson, *Imagining Methodism*, 35-36, 49-50; and Hempton, *Methodism*, 32-53.

[20] See Figure 2: William Hogarth, *Enthusiasm Delineated* (London, 1760-1762), British Museum, 1858,0417.582, accessed July 30, 2018, http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1439204&partId=1&searchText=whitefield&page=1. See also Anderson, *Imagining Methodism*, 110, 112, 150, 151-59, 161-70.

zeal. In another version of this print, Hogarth sharpens his critique of enthusiasm by identifying this female figure with Mary Toft, "the Rabbit Woman of Godlaming." *Credulity, Superstition and Fanaticism. A Medley* (1762) adds four rabbits scurrying from the woman's skirts in allusion to Toft's implantation of animal carcasses in her womb to fake an unnatural birth.[21] The new title uses a constellation of terms that linked Methodist zeal with other dissenting groups like Roman Catholics.[22] Hogarth's caricature of dangerous zeal resurfaced during the early Romantic period, showing that denigration of Methodist enthusiasm had not abated; if anything, it had intensified. When Isaac Mills engraved the design, he returned to "Hogarth's first thought for the medley": *Enthusiasm Delineated*. Mills also loses the rabbits, suggesting that his audience no longer needed the specter of charlatan Mary Toft (who had died in 1763) to interpret a swooning woman as embodying fabricated religious zeal. The long life of prints like Hogarth's indicates the persistence of Methodism's negative association with women and their enthusiasms.

Despite these mid-century critiques, women still held some authority in Wesleyan circles, at least until a confluence of religious and political upheavals shook loose female enthusiasts' tenuous hold on verbal leadership. When John Wesley died in 1791, women lay preachers lost an influential if inconsistent advocate for spiritual gender equality;[23] moreover, Wesley's death

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[21] See Figure 3: Detail of William Hogarth, *Credulity, Superstition, and Fanaticism. A Medley* (London, 1762), British Museum, 1868,0822.1624; and the British Museum webpage's description, accessed July 30, 2018, http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1439184&partId=1&searchText=enthusiasm&page=1. See also Anderson, *Imagining Methodism*, 54, 110, 112, 150, 151-59, 161-70. On Mary Toft, see Philip K. Wilson, "Toft [née Denyer], Mary (bap. 1703, d. 1763), the rabbit-breeder," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2014), accessed August 7, 2018, http://www.oxforddnb.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-27494.

[22] For Catholicism and superstition, see Anderson, *Imagining Methodism*, 43; Lloyd, *Women and the Shaping of British Methodism*, 19; Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 6. For the superstition of "popular" religionists like witches, see Kent, *Wesley and the Wesleyans*, 6, 22.

[23] See Lloyd, *Women and the Shaping of British Methodism*, 16; Mack, *Heart Religion*, 140; and Hempton, *The Religion of the People*, 183. For Methodism's lay preachers—male and female—see Mack, *Heart Religion*, 3-5, 7.

coincided with the French Revolution and shortly preceded the Napoleonic Wars, giving new Methodist leaders further cause to distrust the enthusiasm of exceptional female parishioners.[24] As David Hempton observes, early nineteenth-century "female preachers fell victim to the same tide of connexional reaction as swept over ranters, radicals and revivialists" due to conservatism among second-generation Methodist leaders like Jabez Bunting (1779-1858). When the Conference of 1802 decreed it "'contrary both to scripture and to prudence that women should preach or exhort in public,'"[25] that "prudence" was fraught with distrust not only of female enthusiasm, but also of the political radicalism with which it had become inextricably linked. As Romanticism's second generation came of age, Methodist women were barred from training and preaching as professional ministers.[26] By the 1820s and 1830s, the British culture's association of dissenting women with religious and political enthusiasms had effectively shut them out of leadership roles in the very sect that initially welcomed their unconventional faith experiences.

The career of prophetess Joanna Southcott (1750-1814) confirmed these concerns about radical enthusiasm, and her proclamations of divine inspiration embodied even more clearly the eighteenth century's notion of enthusiasm as a feminine phenomenon. Southcott's visionary career aligns closely with Romanticism's first generation, extending from her predictions of French conflict in 1792 until her claim of a new immaculate conception just before her death in 1814.[27] While the "Shiloh" pregnancy supported Southcott's prediction that "a female figure

[24] See Lloyd, *Women and the Shaping of British Methodism*, 6, 43-47, 54-55.

[25] Hempton, *The Religion of the People*, 184; cf. 94, 100-101.

[26] See Lloyd, *Women and the Shaping of British Methodism*, 4.

[27] See Lloyd, *Women and the Shaping of British Methodism*, 6; Hempton, *The Religion of the People*, 184; and Sylvia Bowerbank, "Southcott, Joanna (1750–1814), prophet and writer," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), accessed August 7, 2018, http://www.oxforddnb.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-26050.

would bring about millennial change"—a claim nearly 20,000 Britons believed—many viewed the charade as a distortion of Christian womanhood.[28] This final "drama" enabled critics to dismiss her as a "disorderly woman" by "represent[ing her] disorders as bodily" rather than intellectual or even spiritual.[29] But for most of her life, Southcott's creativity was intellectual, not physical. The "voice" Southcott heard at all hours drove her to produce at least five books, 65 pamphlets, and 10,000 pages of manuscript text. Her enthusiasm was inextricably bound with her authorship, and with her vocal assertions of legitimacy and power. Her broad circulation rivaled that of the period's best-known literary authors, and she managed the publishing marketplace as a professional, despite the sneers of those above her on the social ladder.[30] The specter of Southcott and other popular prophets joined Methodists and Catholics in giving a face to the eighteenth-century Anglican establishment's fear of feminized, unregulated religious feeling. At the same time, however, this trepidation reinforced enthusiasm's power for women's production of inspired text, as well as the power of inspiration for popular literary consumption.

III. French Radicalism, the "Female Enthusiast," and the "Man of Feeling"

While Britain was occupied with the heterodoxies of Methodism and Millenarianism, France was interested in a more appealing side of enthusiasm: artistic inspiration and productivity. Mid-eighteenth-century French philosophers took a more secularized view of the concept, expressing caution but not distrust, and carefully distinguishing this artistic enthusiasm from uncontrolled feminine emotionality. As Mary D. Sheriff has shown, "enthusiasm" became an important point of intersection—and of contention—for the vocabulary of genius as codified by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raissoné des*

[28] Bowerbank, "Southcott"; see also Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 50.

[29] Cragwall, *Lake Methodism*, 160.

[30] Bowerbank, "Southcott"; Cragwall, *Lake Methodism*, 172.

sciences, des arts et des métiers (1751-65).[31] The artist's enthusiasm—like that of the lay prophet or Methodist preacher—manifested as "a kind of furor that seizes and masters the spirit; that enflames the imagination, elevates it, and renders it fertile" for divine inspiration;[32] however, in his entry for the *Encyclopédie*, Louis de Cahusac links enthusiasm with reason rather than imagination, thus avoiding the concept's less stable affiliations. Even though enthusiasm designates an "impetuous movement" of the mind, Cahusac argues, it "is always produced by an operation of reason" and a subsequent "cool[ing]" for reflective analysis.[33] Cahusac accepts enthusiasm's emotionality but modifies its source and nature. As Sheriff argues, this strategy "disavow[s] femininity" in order "to rescue the fine arts from those aspects of mind and body" compromised in earlier discourses. Only if estranged from feminine imagination could enthusiasm become "reason's masterpiece."[34]

By the 1790s, conservative Britons viewed French enthusiasm not so much as reason's masterpiece as reason's perversion, and a feminine one at that. Much like Methodist enthusiasm, French political zeal received scathing treatment by reactionary British presses who degradingly feminized the Jacobins and their British sympathizers. For example, William Dent's *French Feast of Reason* (1793) satirizes France's atheistic turn by showing Notre Dame transformed into a chaotic "Temple of Reason" where republican devotees have "placed a woman in the dress of

[31] See Chapter 1 of Mary D. Sheriff, *Moved by Love: Inspired Artists and Deviant Women in Eighteenth-Century France* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008), 15-40.

[32] Sheriff, *Moved by Love*, 19.

[33] Sheriff, *Moved by Love*, 16, 20, 23. Hogarth ascribed to a similar idea (see Anderson, *Imagining Methodism*, 37). This need for cooling also prefigures William Wordsworth's maxim that poetic composition requires "emotion recollected in tranquility" (Preface to *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems*, in *The Cornell Wordsworth*, gen. ed. Stephen Parrish [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975-2007], VII, 756).

[34] Sheriff, *Moved by Love*, 40, 18, 16.

Liberty and worshiped her as their Divinity."[35] Liberty's rosy cheeks, corpulent figure, and Medusa-like hair make her a ghastly sight, and her seat on "Pandora's Box" suggests that when she rises she will unleash unforeseen evil. For Dent, this blindness to hypocrisy and to its social consequences is precisely what signifies radical enthusiasm: "however pleasing the Figure and Devices of those Hypocritical Monsters might appear," his caption reads, "those unblinded by enthusiasm could view them in no other light than they are here too truly delineated." Dent's claim to truthfully "delineate" French radicalism recalls Hogarth's earlier religious satire.[36] Such cartoons not only deem radical views hypocritical and foolish, but they also figure the enthusiast as decidedly un-British. In the upper left corner of Dent's etching is the following advice: "CONTRAST this with HAPPY ENGLAND."[37] If Methodist enthusiasm was anti-Anglican, then French enthusiasm was anti-English; both were foreign to notions of masculinized reason.

But the Romantic-era enthusiast need not be French, female, or heretical to draw disdain; he need only exhibit traits that had, by this point, been firmly linked with those identities. The anti-Jacobins were especially keen to lambast excessive feeling in men and women alike, though their novels were often excessively long and emotional themselves. Many invoked enthusiasm in their titles. For example, *Theodore: Or the Enthusiast* (1807) expressly combatted Jacobinism and extreme sentiment.[38] The anonymously published novel follows an ill-fated enthusiast whose

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[35] See Figure 4: William Dent, *The French Feast of Reason, or the Cloven-foot Triumphant* (London: James Aitken, 1793), British Museum, 1868,0808.6313, accessed July 30, 2018, http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1634884&partId=1&searchText=enthusiasm&page=2.

[36] Dent's claim that enthusiasm blinds political actors may recall Richard Newton's *The Blind Enthusiast* (London: William Holland, 1792), British Museum, 2007,7058.3, accessed July 30, 2018, http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=3062706&partId=1&searchText=enthusiasm&page=1. In this satire, Newton figures leading abolitionist William Wilberforce wearing a fool's cap and being blindfolded by a Caribbean slave.

[37] Dent, *The French Feast of Reason*.

[38] *Theodore: Or The Enthusiast* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1807).

excessive passions derail his monastic commitments. Like most tales of enthusiasm, *Theodore* abounds with swooning, fevers, emotional outbursts, unrequited love, and tragic death, but poetic sensibility and love of nature cast the protagonist as a different sort of enthusiast: a "man of feeling." Theodore Rosenthal is German, not French, connecting him to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's protagonist, Werther, rather than to Methodist preachers or French radicals. But for the author of *Theodore*, like many critics of enthusiasm, these three veins of unpardonable sentiment cohere around irreverence: Methodist preaching rejected Anglicanism's sacred book, French radicalism rejected its God, and *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) rejected its view of sacred human life.[39] Thus, anti-Jacobin texts like *Theodore* add the Goethean "man of feeling" trope to other enthusiastic stereotypes in order to further denigrate hyper-emotionality, not only because it feminizes men, but also because it confuses religious devotion with human feeling. By the turn of the century, "enthusiast" had collected many scandalous avatars, and it had gained traction as an insult amongst those bent on saving Britain from the dangers of strong feeling.

Anti-Jacobins used their targets' foreignness and effeminacy to oppose them to presumed British values, but feminine enthusiasm sometimes offered an acceptable alternative to political zeal. Girondin sympathizer and French assassin Charlotte Corday gave artists a real female enthusiast to latch onto amid the increased British fear of violent revolution, but their depictions actually validate more moderate enthusiasms. Infamous for the stabbing of Jacobin journalist Jean-Paul Marat in 1793, Corday appears at her trial in James Gillray's print of the same year,

[39] Originally published German in 1774, Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* was translated into English by 1779 and became a key embodiment of Romantic-era sentimentality, and particularly of the "man of feeling" trope. The phrase actually comes from a slightly earlier novel by Scottish writer Henry Mackenzie. *The Man of Feeling* (1771) intended to satirize hyperemotionality, but, as Barker-Benfield shows, was misinterpreted as a validation of strong feeling (*The Culture of Sensibility*, 144-48, cf. 250).

The Heroic Charlotte Le Cordé.[40] The title prepares readers for a sarcastic gloss of Corday's heroism, but the print depicts Corday in ambiguous, even positive terms compared to the men at her trial. The least caricatured figure in the design, Corday stands erect and wears a surprisingly calm expression—she is not hysterical, nor is she hypersexualized.[41] Moreover, her eloquent speech and association with Judith clarify Gillray's scathing critique of Marat, who, like Holofernes, is the villain of this story.[42] Corday elicits sympathy from British readers because she has "rid the World of that monster of Atheism and Murder, the Regicide MARAT." Corday's opposition to the Terror raises her in British opinion. More importantly, though, Gillray links Corday's relative moderation with her enthusiasm. The header reads, "The noble enthusiasm with which this Woman met the charge, & the elevated disdain with which she treated the self created Tribunal, struck the whole assembly with terror & astonishment."[43] Having eliminated a more insidious enthusiasm, hers is justified despite her womanhood, her Frenchness, and even her criminality.

Gillray's acceptance of Charlotte Corday's "enthusiasm" shows an important shift in the term's links to radicalism and femininity during the 1790s; fourteen years later, Corday would again embody the more ambiguous female enthusiasm received by women writers coming of age during the 1790s-1810s. *The Female Enthusiast* (1807), written by South Carolina playwright

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[40] See Figure 5: *The Heroic Charlotte La Cordé, upon her trial, ...* (London: Hannah Humphrey, 1793). British Museum, 1868,0808.6304, accessed July 30, 2018, http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1477603&partId=1&searchText=enthusiasm&page=2.

[41] These quotations are taken from the online catalogue description on the British Museum's webpage.

[42] According to the Book of Judith, a Jewish widow gains access to the enemy leader Holofernes by promising compromising intelligence about her own people. Judith beheads him, saves her people, and returns a hero. Similarly, Corday ingratiated herself with Marat by promising information, and then she stabbed him in his bath. As her speech in the Gillray print foreshadows, Corday was executed by guillotine for Marat's murder.

[43] Gillray, *The Heroic Charlotte La Cordé*.

Sarah Pogson (later Smith),[44] makes enthusiasm Corday's defining trait; however, rather than using the label to denigrate radical women, the play, even more than Gillray's print, elevates a certain kind of "enthusiast" above the stereotypes of French radicalism that we see in Dent. While not unequivocally heroic, Pogson's Corday is visionary, active, and sacrificial; she benefits by comparison to passive, immoral men;[45] and she possesses remarkable eloquence. As Angela Vietto observes, Corday has "some of the most strident and articulate speeches of any female character in early U. S. literature."[46] Thus, while skeptics still used a feminized French radicalism to undermine "enthusiastic" literary productions, a substantial undercurrent valued enthusiasm's fitness for poetry, even poetry by women. That undercurrent informs Romantic women's efforts to reclaim the label as one of power and authority during the 1820s and 1830s.

IV. Romanticism and the Problem of Enthusiasm

As the foregoing sections show, by the end of the eighteenth century enthusiasm had come to signal heterodox acts, politically and religiously speaking. The broader literary world sought to challenge this verdict of enthusiasm by sanitizing it of vulgar religious associations and feminine forms, even as it often retained connections to radical politics during the early years of the British Romantic movement. When William Wordsworth advocated the "spontaneous

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[44] Sarah Pogson (later Smith), *The Female Enthusiast: A Tragedy in Five Acts* (Charleston: J. Hoff, 1807), rpt. in *Women's Early American Historical Narratives*, ed. Sharon M. Harris (New York: Penguin, 2003), 158ff.

[45] For additional commentary on Pogson's *The Female Enthusiast*, see John Mac Kilgore, *Mania for Freedom: American Literatures of Enthusiasm from the Revolution to the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 25-26, 39; Sandra Wilson Perot, *Theatre Women and Cultural Diplomacy in the Transatlantic Anglophone World (1752-1807)*, (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2016), 423; "Sarah Pogson Smith," in *Transatlantic Feminisms in the Age of Revolutions*, ed. Lisa L. Moore, Joanna Brooks, and Caroline Wigginton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 350; Angela Vietto, *Women and Authorship in Revolutionary America* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 9, 63-66; and Zoe Detsi-Diamanti, *Early American Women Dramatists, 1775-1860* (New York: Garland, 1998), 85-86. In 1810, Percy Bysshe Shelley and Thomas Hogg published anonymously a "Fragment: Supposed to be an Epithalamium of Francis Ravaillac and Charlotte Corday," in *Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson . . . Edited by John Fitzvictor*. See *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Neville Rogers (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), I, 70-73. See also Suzanne L. Barnett, "*Epipsychidion* as a Posthumous Fragment," *Keats-Shelley Journal* 65 (2016): 89.

[46] "Sarah Pogson (1774-1870)," in *Women's Early American Historical Narratives*, 157.

overflow of powerful feeling" as the basis of "all good poetry," he appropriated concepts like sensibility and emotionality from more stereotypically feminine aesthetics and from women themselves. In addition to plucking the empowering aspects of feminine zeal from Methodist conversion narratives and novels of sensibility, his famous Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) coopted Joanna Baillie's idea that strong feeling drives good literature, but only when subjected to personal reflection. Her Introductory Discourse to *A Series of Plays: In which it is Attempted to Delineate the Stronger Passions of the Mind* (1798) asserts that "immediate feeling" benefits from contemplating "the relation of that feeling to others." In other words, the ability to "reflect and reason" on "human nature" is what transforms raw feeling into good poetry, even if those capacities are rare in Baillie's estimation.[47] However, Romantic-era religious groups like Wesley's actively cultivated self-reflection through reason,[48] which linked them with French Enlightenment thinkers. Thus, Wordsworth's caveat about "emotion recollected in tranquility" has its basis in earlier Methodist and French philosophical discourses of enthusiastic regulation,[49] but was also filtered through women's discourse that preceded his own enthusiasm-laden poetic theory. Just as eighteenth-century writers borrowed women's sentimental morality to remake the rake as the "man of feeling,"[50] first-generation Romantic poets appropriated women's poetics—along with the nuances that protected them—to forge Romanticism's masculine ideal.

[47] [Joanna Baillie], Introductory Discourse, in *A Series of Plays: In which it is Attempted to Delineate the Stronger Passions of the Mind* (London: T. Cadell, Jun. and W. Davies, 1798), I, 13-15.

[48] See notes 6 and 33, above.

[49] See Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 219.

[50] See Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*, 250.

This "colonization of the feminine," as Alan Richardson has termed it,[51] meant that enthusiasm was reintroduced to literary Britain in a more secularized, masculinized form that sanitized the poetics of religious inspiration and blatantly redistricted feminine enthusiastic character. For second-generation male Romantics, this redistricting often relied on lines drawn in the eighteenth century between high philosophical enthusiasm and its vulgar religious cousin: superstition. For instance, as Jasper Cragwall observes, Percy Bysshe Shelley's poetic theory relies on shaky distinctions between his verse and the ecstasies of working-class Methodists.[52] Romantic poetic enthusiasm is lofty, not vulgar; "[p]oets are prophets, but not *that* kind of prophet."[53] As with many ideas in Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* (written 1820-1821), this model of enthusiasm reworks earlier philosophy. British philosophers from John Locke to Edmund Burke weighed in on enthusiasm,[54] but Shelley's effort to pit poetic against religious fervor finds its closest relative in the writings of Anthony Ashley-Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713). In *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711), Shaftesbury takes great pains to secure masculine sensibility from unsavory feminine models. He abjures masculinity of "the vulgar enthusiastic kind," which he blames on "female saints."[55] As G. J. Barker-Benfield notes, Shaftesbury "determin[ed] to draw a clear line between true and false 'enthusiasm'";[56] moreover, by designating as "true" a "fair and plausible enthusiasm, a reasonable ecstasy and

[51] Alan Richardson, "Romanticism and the Colonization of the Feminine," in *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. Anne K. Mellor (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 13–25.

[52] See Cragwall, *Lake Methodism*, 20, 158, 185-204.

[53] Cragwall, *Lake Methodism*, 192.

[54] See Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 38-48.

[55] Anthony Ashley-Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, 2 vols. combined, ed. John M. Robertson (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964 [1900]), II, 24; II, 179; qtd. in Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*, 113, 117. Cf. Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 49.

[56] Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*, 109.

transport,"[57] Shaftesbury signals that, despite sentiment's growing hold on masculine ideals, rationality still rules the day. As Romantic poets later affirm, the poet-enthusiast was safe as long as he distanced himself from the emotional excesses of religious zeal and feminine sensibility.

Male Romantics thus responded to gendered stereotypes of religious heterodoxy and political radicalism with an older strategy for dividing enthusiasm into good (i.e. refined by masculine reason) and bad (i.e. fomented by feminine emotionality) versions. This series of events left post-war women with a conundrum: How could they build *oeuvres* around an enthusiastic poetics tainted by prejudices against Methodistical zeal and Jacobin politics? How could they reclaim the literary sensibilities carefully coopted by better-educated male poets? And finally, how could they participate in this ascendant, feeling-driven vein of literature without succumbing to its dangers? The answer for many second-generation women was to depart from earlier women writers' more politicized claims to rhetorical power. Instead, they renovated enthusiasm by emphasizing its association with feminine restraint—drawn from religious and secular sources alike—and by linking it to versions of female genius with less visceral connection to the prophetic and political kinds of fervor that Britons had come to fear.

In the decade of Southcott's greatest popularity and of Corday's dramatic revival as "female enthusiast," women writers gained an enthusiastic avatar that avoided the religious and political controversies in which these women had been embroiled. Ironically, this avatar came from a French novel: Germaine de Staël's *Corinne, ou l'Italie* (1807). Quickly translated into English, read widely, and imitated by many British writers, *Corinne* offered an alternative vision of the female enthusiast through the Italian tradition of improvisation. As Kari Lokke and Angela

[57] Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, II, 125.

Esterhammer observe,[58] Staël models the inspired woman as an improvising poetess secured from the taint of Southcottian prophetic zeal by her secularity and from the danger of French radicalism by her artistry. Corinne is beloved by the Italian public and by a Scottish peer who happens to see her while visiting Rome. These very different audiences both admire Corinne for qualities that, during the Romantic period, signified enthusiasm; however, Corinne's challenge to the status quo poses less of a threat because of her remove from England and her avoidance of religious or political prophecy. Understandably, then, Staël's *improvisatrice* provided a more acceptable, less suspect avatar of feminine genius, which many women writers joined with the female enthusiast in order to renovate the label and the character it represented.

By marrying these religious and secular enthusiasms, women distanced themselves from the condemnations of Methodists, revolutionaries, and Jacobin sympathizers as confronted by their foremothers; moreover, by inflecting their female enthusiasts with the model of Corinne, which had swayed improvisation toward the feminine in the British imagination, they also avoided direct competition with male poets of strong feeling. But the combining of this *improvisatrice* model with the heretical prophetess had costs of its own, even as it provided a space for female enthusiasm that protected women writers from censure by its religious and literary critics. By incorporating secular forms of enthusiasm, these Staëlians diluted the widely recognizable authority secured through prophetesses and their religious claims to divine contact. Fictional female enthusiasts often appear as confused characters, and enthusiastic poetic speakers present an anxious conflictedness rather than an ideal, amalgamated model of feminine agency.

[58] See Kari Lokke, "British Legacies of *Corinne* and the Commercialization of Enthusiasm," in *Staël's Philosophy of the Passions: Sensibility, Society, and the Sister Arts*, ed. Tili Boon Cuillé and Karyna Szmurlo (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2013), 171-90; Angela Esterhammer, "The Scandal of Sincerity: Wordsworth, Byron, Landon," in *Romanticism, Sincerity and Authenticity*, ed. Tim Milnes and Kerry Sinanan (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 108-9; and Angela Esterhammer, *Romanticism and Improvisation, 1750-1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 97.

Furthermore, by choosing the Corinne myth as a starting point, many poets and novelists found themselves locked into a narrative that—like Staël's— presupposed the heroine's inability to survive when her art and romantic love proved incompatible. Like her religious counterpart, the *improvisatrice* struggled to find a place in her society. Each version of the female enthusiast offered advantages and drawbacks, so many nineteenth-century women writers attempted a cross-pollination in hopes of empowering female enthusiasm without destroying it. As a result, their frequent vacillations among prophetess, *improvisatrice*, and poetess conveyed indecision rather than evincing a clear pattern of secularization or a unified representation of female genius.

V. Nineteenth-Century Women and the Female Enthusiast

The proliferation of female enthusiast figures in literature of this period, along with Southcott's death in 1814 and the end of the French wars in 1815, suggests that women's literature was poised for a rethinking of how enthusiastic models of inspiration reflect and influence female poets' definitions of self and work. As two equally problematic versions of what Jon Mee terms the "self-authenticating subject,"[59] prophets and improvisers represent competing and, as I will show, conflated, versions of the enthusiastic powers claimed by the Romantic woman poet: inspiration and effusion. In attempting to wed these discourses by supplementing religious vocabulary with secularized poetics, these women often lost their most apparent claim to authority under the historical category of Christian enthusiasm. The divine authority they drew from Methodist conceptions of the term called for an emptying of self, whereas improvisation touted personal agency and creativity. The two often clashed in women's own lives, and in the female enthusiast protagonists and poetic speakers they imagined in their literary work. Thus, as nineteenth-century women writers re-accessed and re-defined the female

[59] Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 6.

enthusiast through a blurring of "religious" and "secular" models, they often found the marriage difficult, even compromising, in their work toward literary agency.

Women writing in the 1820s and 1830s consistently invoked the female enthusiast despite—or perhaps because of—her controversial legacy; fittingly, these women also invoked corresponding discourses of regulation. The care with which these women approached enthusiasm speaks to evolving conversations around women's restraint, which was valued not only in religious circles but also by early feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft. Self-control became more than a sign of piety: for enthusiastic women, the concept of regulation merged Evangelical practices of reflection with feminism's more secular approach to women's education and self-possession. Restraint proved important in private and public alike, and the women I discuss show how regulation empowers the female enthusiast to use her gifts in artistically valuable (if not always socially acceptable) ways. My dissertation poses two key questions for the evolution of women's inspirational poetics in the nineteenth century: Why do Romantic-era women revive the flawed, controversial figure of the female enthusiast? And how do individual women's religious beliefs and literary touchstones affect their articulations of inspiration via female enthusiasm's central paradox of personal and divine agency? Since these complex questions elude a single, representative answer, I have organized my four chapters around individual women's responses. By tracing their relationships to biblical, classical, and Romantic-era discourses of inspiration, we can see the different ways women regulated female enthusiasm in hopes of finding a place for it in their own social circles. Their diverse strategies and uneven successes in redeeming the female enthusiast show the importance of experimentation and even failure for arriving at the more viable, professional female poet who reigned in the Victorian age.

I begin in Chapter 2 by illuminating Mary Shelley's use of historical fiction to embody multiple female enthusiasms and to critique Romantic poetics' sanitizing of the concept. During Shelley's feminocentric turn between *Frankenstein* (1818) and her husband's death, she became invested in the female enthusiast. A mysterious middle-aged prophetess named Diotima appears in "The Fields of Fancy," a dreamlike draft introduction to *Mathilda*, and then Shelley launches a more thorough meditation on female enthusiasm in her second published novel, *Valperga; or, The Adventures of Castruccio Castracani* (1823). While the title names a male hero, the narrative centers on the opposition of two women: Euthanasia dei Adimari and Beatrice of Ferrara. As a prophetess, Beatrice is the more likely enthusiast figure, but Shelley proves Euthanasia's claim to a different kind of female enthusiasm. Beatrice's passive receptivity makes her vulnerable to manipulation, but Euthanasia's learned regulation counteracts stereotypical Romantic-era associations of women's enthusiasm with heterodoxy and uncontrollable emotion. I posit that Shelley conflates her heroines' regulated and unregulated enthusiasms to critique P. B. Shelley's poetics. Then, she uses Euthanasia's character to embody an alternative, feminine approach to regulating enthusiasm. Significant overlap between *Valperga*'s composition and *The Defence of Poetry*'s conceptualization supports my claim that Mary Shelley's novel rejects P. B. Shelley's attempt to safeguard the prophetic quality of his own poetry by differentiating it from working-class Methodism. Indeed, *Valperga*'s most Percy-Shelleyan character, Euthanasia, still exhibits Beatrice's fervor, but her control of that fervor emerges from feminine ideals gleaned from Evangelicalism and from the feminism of Shelley's mother, Mary Wollstonecraft. Euthanasia's self-regulated enthusiasm reconciles the *Defence*'s concerns in a way that offers women an escape from patriarchal control, but Euthanasia herself does not achieve it. Shelley's drowned

enthusiast shows that even the loftiest woman cannot survive in a society set on marginalizing her genius.

Like Shelley, Letitia Elizabeth Landon recognizes the female enthusiast's precariousness, but she creates self-preservative detachment though innovations on the rapidly developing genre of the dramatic monologue during the 1820s and 1830s. Chapter 3 begins with an extended reading of *The Improvisatrice* (1824), which incorporates a series of nested monologues with female enthusiast speakers. Landon's frame shows the easy slippage from lyric into dramatic verse and makes explicit the latter form's dependence on characterization. *The Improvisatrice* resists an autobiographical interpretation through its multiplication of speakers, granting Landon distance to safely critique the social issues of embodiment, representation, and romance that haunted female enthusiast discourse. Later poems like "Erinna" (1826) and "The Prophetess" (1838) reveal how Landon's career-long development of the dramatic monologue parallels her changing understanding of female enthusiasm. "Erinna" loses the intricate frame narrative and departs from typical poetess versions of female enthusiasm by avoiding a love plot. In "The Prophetess," Landon pushes this trend even further by jettisoning frame and name in favor of an enthusiast archetype. The speaker re-accesses an enthusiastic model more biblical than Sapphic, showing how Landon expands her conception of women's inspiration to include religious prophecy and to exclude the seeming imperative of tragic lovesickness. The arc of these three poems shows how Landon uses dramatic monologue to form female enthusiasm as a diverse subject that transcends the autobiographical and even the stereotypical. The genre gives her distance to write and rewrite such a character.

Chapter 4 coheres less around a genre than around a woman writer who struggled to choose one. Maria Jane Jewsbury explored female enthusiasm across literary forms in order to

compare religious zeal and poetic genius, as well as their consequences for women of literary ambition. *The History of an Enthusiast*, a novella that appeared in 1830 as one of Jewsbury's *Three Histories*, follows a precocious girl who grapples with the powers and social compromises of enthusiastic character. Julia Osborne's story embodies the central conundrum of this project: that many Romantic-era women valued female enthusiasm but could not find a suitable place for it. Julia's inability to unite happiness with literary success raises all the ghosts of Jewsbury's own career struggles; moreover, her conflicted view of enthusiasm emerges in alternating praise for Julia's abilities and censure of Julia's ambition. In this chapter, I situate *History*'s enthusiasm within the longer arc of Jewsbury's engagement with the concept. Her sickbed conversion at Leamington in 1827 significantly influenced the content and tone of *Letters to the Young* (1828) and *Lays of Leisure Hours* (1829). The first text reassesses Jewsbury's fondness for Romantic verse in light of her newly acquired Evangelical beliefs and warns young readers—girls in particular— against fiery passion and literary ambition. Jewsbury's emphasis on regulation through biblical principles carries into the loosely devotional verse of *Lays*, which gives older readers similar warnings: glorious as they are, the flights of poetic genius are incompatible with earthly happiness. Careful attention to these texts shows that enthusiasm was not a new concept for Jewsbury in 1830; she had been mulling it over for years. Reading *History* anew in this light reveals the novella as a more thorough fictional culmination of sustained conflict on the subjects of poetic fervor, religious responsibility, and gendered implications of literary fame.

I conclude with a case study in the Victorian inheritance of Romantic female enthusiasm. By the time she published *Aurora Leigh* in 1856, Elizabeth Barrett Browning had eschewed her literary grandmothers,[60] but her famous exposition of women's poetic vocation relies heavily,

[60] See EBB to H. F. Chorley, January 7, 1845, in *The Brownings' Correspondence: An Online Edition* (2018), accessed July 25, 2018,

though not nominally, on the female enthusiast archetype I have traced in Shelley, Landon, and Jewsbury. Forms of "enthusiasm" are conspicuously absent from EBB's epic, but I argue that the female enthusiast haunts EBB's fictional female poet through Miriam's song, Corinne's crown, and tropes of prophecy and conversion. Thus, the female enthusiast's controversial title disappears so that EBB can reconstitute her as a Victorian professional with the narrative space to critique her tainted legacy and develop a new poetic theory. EBB's own history evinces a similar movement from passionate, youthful enthusiasm toward a reflective, professional understanding of female poetic vocation, a shift Chapter 5's latter half traces in EBB's early writing. "My Own Character" (1818) exudes youthful passion, and "Glimpses of My Life and Literary Character" (1820) repeatedly proclaims its author a religious and poetic "enthusiast"; six years later, the preface to *An Essay on Mind, and Other Poems* (1826) defines poetry as both a product and a variety of enthusiasm. These texts demonstrate enthusiasm's vital importance for EBB's Romantic-era articulations of her own poetic identity; moreover, they help explain her total omission of "enthusiasm" from the "most mature of [her] works,"[61] *Aurora Leigh*. By reinventing Aurora as a professional poet for the Victorian age, EBB preserves the Romantic tradition she inherited. She saves the female enthusiast from charges of heterodox self-authorization and unwomanly desire for fame by normalizing regulation as part of a new poetic profession for women. Her female enthusiast, reborn and renamed, avoids the tragic fates of her grandmothers and survives a glorified poet.

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https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/2048/?rsId=134509&returnPage=1. See also Claire Knowles, *Sensibility and Female Poetic Tradition, 1780-1860: The Legacy of Charlotte Smith* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 135; John Woolford, "Elizabeth Barrett and the Wordsworthian Sublime," *Essays in Criticism* 45.1 (1995): 36; and Kathleen Blake, "Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Wordsworth: The Romantic Poet as Woman," *Victorian Poetry* 24.4 (1986): 387.

[61] EBB to John Kenyon, October 17, 1856. This letter was prefixed to the fourth edition of *Aurora Leigh* (1859) and is reprinted in Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, ed. Margaret Reynolds (New York: Norton, 1996), 4.

By analyzing prominent female enthusiast characters and speakers in the *oeuvres* of Shelley, Landon, Jewsbury, and Barrett Browning, I demonstrate how varied, complex, and controversial were their inheritances of literary strong feeling; moreover, the diversity of genres represented helps dispel the notion that enthusiastic poetics featured only in Romantic poetry. From historical novels to dramatic monologues, from essays to epics, British women who began their reading and writing lives amid great controversies of enthusiasm found creative ways to cope. More importantly, their innovative mergers of religious and secular enthusiasms reveal the concept's powerfully expansive meaning during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Though by no means enthusiasm's only heiresses, the writers discussed here show its great authorizing power for literary women during Romanticism's second generation; they also show how that attractive power unsettled their already precarious positions in a literary market that had been primed for a man of feeling but not for a female enthusiast who shared his passionate character.

The tragedies of Euthanasia dei Adimari, the Improvisatrice, and Julia Osborne represent the many ways in which Romantic-era culture placed the female enthusiast on a pedestal only to tear her down with social anxieties about unregulated religious zeal, excessive romantic feeling, and uncontrolled poetic effusion. The writers I discuss here attempted to rectify concerns about self-control—combining religious practices, early feminist principles, and formal restraints to impose order on female enthusiasm. Unlike their male poet contemporaries, they worked to validate and ameliorate enthusiasm, not to sanitize it. And they did make progress by creating admirable female avatars, but the female enthusiast never could seem to escape the consequences of her extraordinary disposition—at least, not until she was divested of her title. The very label that gave the female enthusiast her special matrix of religious and secularized poetic power also hastened her downfall, and only by reconstituting those legacies under a new name could writers

save the female poet from what seemed by mid-century a tragic, foregone conclusion. In what follows, I trace the rise, fall, and rebirth of female enthusiasm from the 1820s through the 1850s in order to argue that women's enthusiastic poetics responded to men's redistricting of strong feeling by reinventing and eventually reconstituting that feeling for their own empowerment. The enthusiastic woman had to fail before she could succeed as a professional female poet.

CHAPTER 2: PROPHETIC ENTHUSIASM AND FEMININE RESTRAINT IN MARY SHELLEY'S *VALPERGA*

Mary Shelley contemplated enthusiasm early and often. In her writing, the figure of the enthusiast encompasses multiple gender identities and incorporates numerous—sometimes contradictory—religious and philosophical allegiances. For example, Victor Frankenstein's unbounded, masculinized zeal for forbidden knowledge and creative power drives the novel for which Shelley is best known. A draft of her next project, *Matilda* (written 1819-1820), represents enthusiasm in the person of a middle-aged prophetess with "[p]oetry . . . on her lips" and fire in her eyes.[1] But in February 1822, while she waited for William Godwin to edit her latest novel manuscript, Shelley composed a sort of prose poem contemplating embodied enthusiasm more abstractly. Demanding of the heavens a clear mind and "thoughts and passions" as "everliving" as the stars, she muses on the memory and feeling of an unidentified female "Enthusiast":

> The Enthusiast
> suppresses her tears — crushes her opening thoughts and —
> But all ~~his~~ is changed — some word some look ~~awak~~ exite the
> lagging ~~spirits~~ ↑blood↓ laughter dances in the eyes & the spirits rise
> proportionably high —[2]

[1] For Victor Frankenstein as an enthusiast, see Chapter 6 of Jasper Cragwall, *Lake Methodism: Polite Literature and Popular Religion in England, 1780-1830* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2013), 184-224; and Jasper Cragwall, "The Shelleys' Enthusiasm," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 68.4 (2005): 631-53. The quotation comes from Mary Shelley's abandoned first draft of *Matilda*. See "Appendix 1: *The Fields of Fancy*," ed. Pamela Clemit, in *The Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley*, gen. ed. Nora Crook and Pamela Clemit, 8 vols. (London: William Pickering, 1996), II, 354; hereafter *Fields of Fancy*.

[2] *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844*, ed. Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Clarendon Press, 1987), I, 396; hereafter *MWSJ*.

The Enthusiast's passion appears in "tears," but she "suppresses" them; she "crushes" her impulse, seemingly to make way for a more even temperament. Shelley's use of dashes disrupts this sense of conquest, however, and line three shifts emphatically toward revealing the difficulty of suppressing strong emotion. Words and looks can "exite [*sic*]" the Enthusiast viscerally, bodily. Her blood warms, and her eyes' "laughter" becomes doubly physicalized as dancing in Shelley's metaphor. As the "spirits rise," the female Enthusiast appears to have broken free of imposed restraint, but one word disturbs that conclusion: "proportionably." We might read this spiritual elevation as increasing in proportion to her laughter, but the adverb reminds readers (and perhaps the writer) of the mechanism of control suggested lines earlier. Rather than allowing her spirit to lift beyond her capacity to "suppres[s]" or "crus[h]" its more untenable potentialities, Shelley's Enthusiast experiences a moment proportionate to her ability and to the situation. She chooses to self-regulate.

The poem's context does not clarify whether Mary Shelley speaks of herself or another woman, or if the capital "E" designates an allegorical female type. But her pronoun usage and physicalized description denote a feminized, female-embodied construction of enthusiasm, which speaks to Shelley's nuanced understanding of the concept as it was developing in the 1820s. Surprisingly, Shelley's clearest reflection on women who function as enthusiasts—and on the attendant powers and consequences of that poetic identity—occurs in her historical fiction. *Valperga; or, The Adventures of Castruccio Castracani* (1823), the novel Godwin was editing when Shelley composed this poem in her journal, meditates at length on gender, prophecy, and enthusiasm. Set in fourteenth-century Italy, *Valperga* adds to the historical account of a Ghibelline tyrant two fictional heroines, both with notable enthusiastic tendencies. In shaping these female characters, Shelley draws on important social contexts and theoretical pre-texts to

create a fictionalized past where she can explore enthusiasm's role in legitimizing women's expression. *Valperga* resonates for second-generation Romantics and their readers by invoking prophecy as a mode of controversial self-authentication that had manifested as both popular religious phenomenon and savvy poetic trope. Shelley multiplies female enthusiasms in *Valperga*, searching across religious, poetic, and philosophical models in an attempt to address the particular challenges of housing enthusiasm in a female body, and revealing the failings of those models in the tragedies of her two heroines. Shelley's novel grapples with a prophetic-poetic ideal that undermines even as it authorizes, that fosters and then destroys feminine empowerment. *Valperga* thus continues earlier strains of thought on female enthusiasm and interrogates possible mechanisms for chastening it into an acceptable, useful, yet powerful form.

Mary Shelley's fictional prophetesses disrupt *Valperga*'s male-driven historical narrative; moreover, as this chapter will argue, they drive a gender-inflected critique of the lofty, masculinized enthusiasm Percy Bysshe Shelley seeks to cultivate in *The Defence of Poetry* (1821/1840) by infusing his poetic model with traits of enthusiastic women drawn from fiction and from her mother's feminist theory. The key months P. B. Shelley spent conceptualizing and writing the *Defence* fall within the timeframe of *Valperga*'s composition, so it seems likely that Mary Shelley's novelistic reflections on enthusiasm engage with her husband's related poetic theory. Euthanasia's idealism and Beatrice's superstition represent contrasting styles of prophecy and, by implication, poetry; however, as in the broadly conceptualized poet-prophet of Shelley's aesthetic theory, a clear separation of these two models proves difficult. Mary Shelley compares and then sharply contrasts her two prophetic heroines in order to create models of regulated and unregulated enthusiasm. But the creative act of poetry, as defined in the *Defence*, proves difficult to categorize securely. Considering Euthanasia, as well as Beatrice, under the enthusiastic mantle

of "prophetess" reveals the dichotomy that Mary Shelley nuances in her second published novel. Shelley's vacillation between like and unlike, between identifying and distinguishing her heroines in their enthusiastic functions, encourages a more nuanced reading of female enthusiasm within increasingly complex discourses of Romantic sensibility and feminine restraint. Aligned by key physical and behavioral features, Euthanasia and Beatrice embody two closely related poetic-prophetic identities for the female enthusiast. Both heroines possess the enthusiasm central to Romantic-era religious and poetic theory, but their expressions of that enthusiasm reveal its danger. Mary Shelley's 1823 novel projects the *Defence*'s ideals, as well as its troublesome ghosts, through portrayals of women writers. In doing so, *Valperga* invites reexamination of the relationship between gender stereotypes surrounding women's enthusiasm and the male prophetic-poetic identity that received guarded praise during the Romantic period.

The *Defence* plays a formative role in *Valperga*'s conception; by reading Beatrice and Euthanasia as instantiations of a more capacious idea of "prophetess," one that struggles to distinguish between regulated and unregulated enthusiasms, we can see how Shelley uses fiction to show the limits of poetic theory. Her novel reveals the complications inherent in her husband's disparate ideas of enthusiasm and, particularly, in the conventional gendering of those ideas. Thus, by figuring these two seemingly opposed enthusiastic styles in female rather than male characters, Mary Shelley raises the stakes. For the woman writer, the fragmented identity of the poet becomes more than a matter of prestige or class distinction. The layering of these identities emphasizes the danger for the enthusiastic poetess in a patriarchal society that does not heed her prophetic utterances and, more significantly, does not take seriously her poetic vocation. By applying eighteenth-century regulatory terminology to the novel's female prophets, we can see how they simultaneously bear spiritual, political, and artistic significance for Mary Shelley's

readership and for modern scholarship on women writers. Beatrice evinces an unregulated, superstitious enthusiasm drawn from historical figures like Joanna Southcott, as well as fictional characters like Germaine de Staël's Corinne and Mary Shelley's own Diotima, the prophetess of the "Fields of Fancy" fragment in *Matilda*. Despite her show of inspiration and eloquence, Beatrice cannot regulate her ill-informed and feverish passion, which precipitates her descent into madness and death. Euthanasia's tragic end derives from a different cause. The novel uses Euthanasia's liberal education, self-conscious reflection, and careful restraint to figure her as a modified Percy-Shelleyan poet-prophet: as a self-regulated enthusiast, she aligns with the *Defence*'s poetic idealism rather than with the superstition Shelley sought to avoid, but Euthanasia's regulation is driven by the ethic of restraint enjoined on women by Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Euthanasia inspires reverence but ultimately fails to be understood by her male peers, demonstrating the incompleteness of Shelley's enthusiast model. Her incomplete successes and final tragedy illustrate just how narrow the margin of error had become for Romantic-era women embracing the label of "enthusiast" in light of its historical, religious, and literary associations. As Shelley knew well, those associations had dangerous potential to compromise women's autonomy and authority.

Critics have largely agreed that *Valperga* is Mary Shelley's revisionist effort to "imagine a wider sphere for women,"[3] but they disagree over that effort's import: one camp sees an

[3] Ann M. Frank Wake, "Women in the Active Voice: Recovering Female History in Mary Shelley's *Valperga* and *Perkin Warbeck*," in *Iconoclastic Departures: Mary Shelley After* Frankenstein*, Essays in Honor of the Bicentenary of Mary Shelley's Birth*, ed. Syndy M. Conger, *et al* (Madison, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997), 238. See also Stuart Curran, "Mothers and Daughters: Poetic Generation(s) in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 63.4 (2000), 590; and Joseph W. Lew, "God's Sister: History and Ideology in *Valperga*," in *The Other Mary Shelley: Beyond Frankenstein*, ed. Audrey A. Fisch, *et al* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 160.

assertion of feminine agency and strength,[4] while the other concludes that even exceptional women are helpless against destructive male ambition like Castruccio's.[5] The heroines' relationship also generates disagreement. Many have read the two women as divergent yet equally unachievable female types, often associating them with opposing ideological forces.[6] Orianne Smith avoids this dichotomizing move by acknowledging subtle differences; her reading uses Shelley's heroines to construct historical continuum of female enthusiasm from "religious fervor" to "political idealism."[7] As we will see, however, these concepts do not sit at opposite poles in Shelley's novel or in the theoretical conversation it joins. Thus, while Smith's continuum acknowledges the subtleties of difference between acceptable and unacceptable enthusiasms, the distance between those states implies a gradual progression (or regression) from one to the other, occluding the immediacy of their clash in Shelley's novel. *Valperga*'s

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[4] See Michael Rossington, introduction to Mary Shelley, *Valperga; or, the Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca*, ed. Michael Rossington, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), xii; and Tilottama Rajan, introduction to Mary Shelley, *Valperga*: *or, The Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca*, ed. Tilottama Rajan (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 1998), 9.

[5] See Orianne Smith, *Romantic Women Writers, Revolution, and Prophecy: Rebellious Daughters, 1786-1826*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 212; Daniel Schierenbeck, "Religion and the Contours of the Romantic-Era Novel," *Romantic Circles: Pedagogies* (2008): par. 16-18, accessed January 22, 2018, https://www.rc.umd.edu/pedagogies/commons/novel/schierenbeck.html; L. Adam Mekler, "Broken Mirrors and Multiplied Reflections in Lord Byron and Mary Shelley," *Studies in Romanticism* 46.4 (2007): 476-79; Sharon M. Twigg, "'Do you then repair my work': The Redemptive Contract in Mary Shelley's *Valperga*," *Studies in Romanticism* 46.4 (2007): 481, 490-91; Kari E. Lokke, *Tracing Women's Romanticism: Gender, History, and Transcendence* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 57-83; Stuart Curran, "*Valperga*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*, ed. Esther Schor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 113-14; Rossington, introduction, xii; Stuart Curran, introduction to Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Valperga: or, the Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca*, ed. Stuart Curran (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), xvii; Lew, "God's Sister," 165; Emily W. Sunstein, *Mary Shelley: Romance and Reality* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1989), 189; and Anne K. Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (New York: Metheun, 1988), 209-10. Deidre Lynch's argument mediates these two, considering the additional agency of Shelley's female characters in *Valperga* but also addressing the undermining of that agency by masculine ambition; see "Historical novelist," in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*, ed. Esther Schor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 145.

[6] See Lynch, "Historical novelist," 145. See also Betty T. Bennett, *Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley: An Introduction*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 89; and Barbara Jane O'Sullivan, "Beatrice in *Valperga*: A New Cassandra," in *The Other Mary Shelley: Beyond Frankenstein*, ed. Audrey A. Fisch, Anne K. Mellor, and Esther H. Schor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 143.

[7] Smith, *Rebellious Daughters*, 200.

enthusiast-heroines demonstrate the impossibility of separating religious from secularized enthusiasm—slippages between those forms emerge from the novel's plot in several scenes this chapter will discuss. More importantly, however, those scenes collectively reveal enthusiasm as *Valperga*'s central tie to Romantic-era poetics. Among religionists and literati alike, "enthusiasm *was* desired as well as disavowed"; thus, as Chapter 1 explains, self-regulation became essential serious consideration as an artist.[8] We have seen that stylistic and ideological sophistication narrowly separated high Romantic poetry from the vulgar rantings of popular women prophets like Southcott, whose controversial death precedes Shelley's novel by less than a decade.[9] Southcott's confident declaration, "'I prophesied truly,'"[10] reverberates in the poetry of male Romantics, but it also features unmistakably in Mary Shelley's sketch of Diotima and, more fully, in her fictional Prophetess of Ferrara. *Valperga* uses female characters' tragedies to illustrate enthusiasm's conditional value for Romantic women writers. She fictionalizes the *Defence*'s theoretical struggle, juxtaposing a Southcottian zealot with a poetic enthusiast whose loftiness emerges only in her successful feminine regulation of enthusiastic ability.

Both of *Valperga*'s heroines struggle with enthusiasm's gifts and curses, but they respond differently. Beatrice's zealous embrace of passion contrasts with Euthanasia's thoughtful explication of her own psychology and careful control of its tendencies. So, while I agree with Smith that "unregulated enthusiasm" precipitates Beatrice's downfall, I disagree with Smith's

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[8] Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2-14; emphasis original. See also Susan Juster, *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 88.

[9] See Schierenbeck, "Religion and the Contours of the Romantic-Era Novel," par. 17; Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 15; Juster, *Doomsayers*, 85; and Cragwall, *Lake Methodism*, 192.

[10] Cragwall, *Lake Methodism*, 187. The imbedded quotation is from Percy Shelley. For declarations involving *Valperga*'s Beatrice, see Mary Shelley, *Valperga: or, the Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca*, ed. Nora Crook, in *The Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley*, gen. ed. Nora Crook and Pamela Clemit, 8 vols. (London: William Pickering, 1996), 136, 138, 150, 152; hereafter cited parenthetically as *Valperga*.

interpretation that Euthanasia's undoing stems from the same flaw.[11] Euthanasia avoids the many traps that ensnare Beatrice precisely by regulating her strong feeling. Her methods incorporate principles of Platonic and Spinozan philosophy, Wollstonecraftian feminism, and even Romantic-era Evangelicalism; perhaps unexpectedly, her resulting character tracks closely with P. B. Shelley's idealistic poet-prophet. But Euthanasia is still an enthusiast. She represents an identity both akin to and consciously apart from that of the superstitious prophet known to Romantic-era readers. In crafting the character of Euthanasia as like in ability but distinct in expression, Shelley illustrates the narrow margin of error for women embracing the label of "enthusiast" with all its power and danger. *Valperga* exemplifies the *Defence*'s ideals through Euthanasia and her foil, Beatrice, begging reexamination of gender's relationship to enthusiastic expression, and poetic theory. Shelley's centering of women has been broadly recognized, but I trace how her Wollstonecraft-inflected feminizing of enthusiastic poetic theory rethinks women's place in a Romantic poetic canon.

The idea of Euthanasia as a feminized P. B. Shelley is not new to this chapter, to modern scholarship on *Valperga*, or even to contemporaneous interpretations of the text. For example, Claire Clairmont remarked offhandedly in an 1836 letter, "Euthanasia is Shelley in female attire."[12] Years earlier, two little-known sonnets by John Watson Dalby connect Euthanasia to

[11] See Smith, *Rebellious Daughters*, 74, 205.

[12] Claire Clairmont to Mary Shelley, March 15, 1836, in *The Clairmont Correspondence: Letters of Claire Clairmont, Charles Clairmont, and Fanny Imlay Godwin, 1808-1879*, ed. Marion Kingston Stocking, 2 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), II, 341. Scholars who mention Clairmont's remark include Michael Rossington, "Future Uncertain: The Republican Tradition and Its Destiny in *Valperga*," in *Mary Shelley and Her Times*, ed. Betty T. Bennett and Stuart Curran, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 253, 254n; Rossington, introduction, xiv; James P. Carson, *Populism, Gender, and Sympathy in the Romantic Novel* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 23; and Jonathan Wordsworth, introduction to Mary Shelley, *Valperga* (New York: Woodstock Books, 1995), n.p. Critics who discuss similarities between Euthanasia and P. B. Shelley include Tilottama Rajan, "Between Romance and History: Possibility and Contingency in Godwin, Leibniz, and Mary Shelley's *Valperga*," in *Mary Shelley in Her Times*, ed. Betty T. Bennett and Stuart Curran (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 89; Rossington, introduction, xxiv; Rossington, "Future Uncertain," 104; and Kate

Shelley and *Valperga* to his poetic theory, suggesting not only the possibility but also the necessity of thinking about how that theory might be embodied in a feminine form. On May 3, 1823, just two months shy of the anniversary of P. B. Shelley's death, Dalby's "Sonnet, To the Author of 'Valperga'" defends the widowed novelist from unfavorable reviews by implying significant overlap among her deceased poet-husband, the characters of her novel, and her own identity as a writer.[13] Dalby joins Godwin in recognizing the draw of *Valperga*'s invented heroines,[14] his response evolving toward a feminocentric reading of the novel that anticipates those of many modern scholars. On the very day that Dalby's "Sonnet, To the Author of 'Valperga,'" appeared, Mary Shelley was thinking of a different connection between fiction and biography. She wrote to Maria Gisborne,

> Did the End of Beatrice surprise you [?] I am surprised that none of these Literary Gazettes are shocked—I feared that they would stumble over a part of what I read to you & still more over my Anathema. . . . Is not the catastrophe strangely prophetic [?] But it seems to me that in what I have hitherto written I have done nothing but prophecy [*sic*] what has arrived to.[15]

Shelley's identification with *Valperga*'s heroines shows in claiming the famous anathema of Volume III as hers, not Beatrice's, and in designating Euthanasia's drowning as "the

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Ferguson Ellis, "*Falkner* and Other Fictions," in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*, ed. Esther Schor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 156.

[13] J[ohn] W[atson] Dalby, "Sonnet, to the Author of 'Valperga,'" *The Literary Chronicle* 18.207 (May 3, 1823): 287. For a more thorough explication of this sonnet's text and publication history, see Rachael Isom, "John Watson Dalby's Poetic Reception of Mary Shelley's *Valperga*," *Keats-Shelley Review* 32.1 (2018): 11-16.

[14] As Crook notes, Godwin suggested the title "Valperga"; Mary Shelley had initially named the novel for its male hero ("Introductory Note," xiii, xvii and note).

[15] To Maria Gisborne, May 3 (May 6) Albaro [1823], *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. Betty T. Bennett, 2 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), I, 336; hereafter *MWSL*. Shelley likely cites *The Literary Gazette*'s March 1 review, which aired a common response to *Valperga*: "In this Novel it is not the events that interest us so much as the actors" ("Valperga; or the Life and Adventures of Castruccio. Prince of Lucca," *The Literary Gazette: A weekly journal of literature, science, and the fine arts* 319 [March 1, 1823]: 132). Pamela Clemit identifies *Matilda*, not *Valperga*, as the prophetic text Mary Shelley alludes to in this letter ("Introductory Note," *Matilda*, 3). See also Sunstein, *Mary Shelley*, 169. The letter does explicitly mention *Matilda* in its next line, but I argue that the more vague phrase "what I have hitherto written" can be interpreted as including *Valperga* as well.

catastrophe" so it can simultaneously refer to P. B. Shelley's end. So, while *The Literary Gazette* does not connect the novel's characters to figures in Mary Shelley's life, she and Dalby both seem to reach that conclusion. Dalby's poetic interweaving of Mary Shelley's life and work fits nicely alongside her reflections on the intrusion of fiction's prophecy into reality's catastrophe, and it prefigures the conclusion Claire Clairmont would draw over a decade later. Most recently, Michael Rossington observes that Euthanasia "is often a vehicle for the expression of ideas in [P. B. Shelley's] brilliant essay . . . 'A Defence of Poetry,'" but his analysis excludes enthusiasm as a significant point of overlap between Mary Shelley's second published novel and her husband's poetic theory.[16] Tracing the works' compositional overlap and locating Euthanasia's prophetic-poetic identity within Romantic-era discussions of enthusiasm augments Rossington's insights in helpful ways. Such explication also clarifies the prophetic functions of Beatrice and Euthanasia in the novel.

I. *Valperga*'s Composition: Contexts and Pre-Texts

The simultaneity of the *Defence*'s and *Valperga*'s composition strengthens my claim that Mary Shelley's novel critiques her husband's poetic theory; furthermore, it illuminates the prophetic functions of Beatrice and Euthanasia as related but differentiated expressions of female enthusiasm. The Shelleys had already worked on father-daughter incest concurrently in *Matilda* (composed 1819-1820) and *The Cenci* (1819), so it makes sense that their reading and writing interests would again align in the years that followed.[17] In the case of *Valperga*, Mary Shelley's "intermittent" writing of 1820 and 1821 brought to fruition her years of reading and research in

[16] Rossington, introduction, xxiv. See also Rossington, "Future Uncertain," 104, 115-16, 253-53n; Mekler, "Broken Mirrors," 461; and Rajan, ed., *Valperga* (Broadview), 452n, 459n.

[17] See Chapter 6 of Cragwall, *Lake Methodism*, 184-224; Cragwall, "The Shelleys' Enthusiasm," 631-53; and Chapter 1. While Cragwall alludes to other works of P. B. Shelley, his principal comparison between the *Defence of Poetry* and *Frankenstein* is anachronistic: *Frankenstein* (1818) was published well before P. B. Shelley composed and, based on Mary Shelley's journals, began formally to conceptualize *A Defence of Poetry*. See entries for January 22-March 20, 1821, in *MWSJ*, I, 350-58.

Italian history.[18] Shelley's journals record her first reading of *Valperga* on July 28, 1821; from August through November she worked almost daily at copying and correcting the manuscript, then labeled with the abbreviation "C. P. of L." (Castruccio, Prince of Lucca), before sending it to Godwin on January 11, 1822 ,to edit and convey to publishers (*MWSJ*, I, 375-84). In the meantime, she fostered the growth of P. B. Shelley's *Defence* by attending with him on January 22, 1821, Tommaso Sgricci's "tragedy la morte d'Ettore" (*MWSJ*, I, 350). Mary Shelley immediately wrote to Claire Clairmont describing Sgricci's "exquisitely delineated" Cassandra and, particularly, her "wondrous & torrent like" prophecies.[19] Five years later, in "The English in Italy" (1826), Shelley remembered "mad Cassandra" and Sgricci's fascination with her: in their post-performance conversation, Sgricci had reflected "that when he poured forth the ravings of the prophetess," all else faded. Prophecy, specifically a woman's prophecy, thus remains the most "vivid recollection" for Sgricci and in Mary Shelley's later published remarks.[20] An Italian review by P. B. Shelley never appeared in print, but it also addressed inspiration, reason, and the poetic imagination, prefiguring the *Defence's* meditations on enthusiasm (*MWSJ*, I, 350n). The shared playgoing experience and the related foci of these responses help establish the Shelleys' harmonious interests in prophecy and inspiration during the early 1820s.

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[18] Crook, "Introductory Note," xi-xii. See also J. Wordsworth, introduction to *Valperga*, n.p.; and Curran, "*Valperga*," 103.

[19] See Mary Shelley to Claire Clairmont, January 24 (24), 1821, in *MWSL*, I, 182; cited in *MWSJ*, I, 350n.

[20] Mary Shelley, "The English in Italy," *Westminster Review* 6 (Oct. 1826): 337, qtd. in *MWSJ*, I, 350n. One paragraph earlier, Shelley reflects on Sgricci's "wonderful" improvisation (336). Shelley's later biography of Sgricci's near contemporary, Metastasio, for *Lardner's Cabinet Cyclopædia* (1835) demonstrates her sustained interest in the art of improvisation and its links with enthusiasm. She describes Metastasio's recitations as lending "an air of almost supernatural intelligence and fire to [his] countenance and person," and carrying away his audience with "enthusiastic delight" (Mary Shelley, "Metastasio. 1698-1782," in *Mary Shelley's Literary Lives and Other Writings*, gen. ed. Nora Crook, 4 vols., vol. I: *Italian Lives*, ed. Tilar J. Mazzeo [London: Pickering & Chatto, 2002], 211; qtd. in Serena Baiesi, *Letitia Elizabeth Landon and Metrical Romance: The Adventures of a "Literary Genius"* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), 79. See also Lisa Vargo, "Mary Shelley and 'the mantle of enthusiasm,'" *European Romantic Review* 19.2 (2008): 172-73.

The couple's shared reading during this period also supports Mary Shelley's participation in the *Defence*'s development in 1821. The two read "the Defence of Poesy by Sir P[hilip] Sidney" and an unnamed text by Horace in early March, and Mary Shelley began fair-copying the *Defence* on March 12, the same day they finished reading its sixteenth-century predecessor (*MWSJ*, I, 350-58).[21] Shelley's title acknowledges the earlier essay's influence, but his capacious reading, much of which was shared with his wife, suggests a broader excavation of historical poetic theory in anticipation of his own. Preceding the *Defence*'s composition and fair-copying, the Shelleys pored over classical and religious texts written by or about poetic-prophetic figures. In February and March 1820, the Shelleys tackled three major biblical prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel—but that reading was interspersed with Platonic philosophy (*MWSJ*, I, 308-313, 345). For example, in mid-February, "S. reads Plato — & Jeremiah" (*MWSJ*, I, 309). Mary Shelley does not specify a title for this reading, but we know that P. B. Shelley translated Plato's *Symposium* in 1818,[22] and in May 1820 she records his reading *Phaedrus* aloud (*MWSJ*, 317). Finally, the couple returned to a collaborative translation of Baruch Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* during the months leading up to the *Defence*.[23] While no extant copy survives of the "perfect translation" (*MWSJ*, I, 305n), we do have the Shelleys' rendering of Spinoza's "On Prophecy," which disavows the modern-day prophet but admits the possibility of

[21] Feldman and Scott-Kilvert confirm Mary Shelley's fair-copying of Percy's *Defence* (356n). See also *The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts*, ed. Michael O'Neill, gen. ed. Donald H. Reiman, 22 vols. (New York: Garland, 1994), XX, 3, 20-83; hereafter *BSM*. Rossington and Mekler both note the overlap of Mary Shelley's copying of the *Defence* and the late stages of her composition of *Valperga* (Rossington, introduction, xxiv; and Mekler, "Broken Mirrors," 461). Mary Shelley returned to "Sir P.h. Sydneys D. of Poet[r]y" in a journal entry of 1822, which follows closely on the leaves describing P. B. Shelley's funeral (*MWSJ*, I, 426).

[22] Michael O'Neill, "Shelley, Percy Bysshe (1792–1822)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); online ed., ed. David Cannadine (April 2016), accessed January 3, 2017, http://www.oxforddnb.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/view/article/25312.

[23] As Feldman and Scott-Kilvert note, the couple had begun translating Spinoza in October 1817 and returned to complete the project in January 1820; however, despite seeking a publisher in 1822, the text never appeared in print, and the manuscript seems to have been lost (*MWSJ*, I, 305-6 and n).

imaginative interlocution with the divine. "God may communicate with the mind of man," but no one (Christ excepted) "ever apprehended the revelations of God without the assistance of the imagination."[24] Unfortunately, little else remains of the Shelleys' rendition of Spinozan philosophy, but we can reasonably assume that they translated, or at least read, his two-chapters-long argument for "a vivid imagination" as the foremost "qualification to prophecy" ("On Prophecy," 274). This view reappears when the *Defence* privileges imagination among poetic qualities, indicating that P. B. Shelley endorsed, at least in part, Spinoza's ideas about inspiration, and suggesting a possible source for his affiliation of poetry with prophecy based on those shared characteristics. During this distillation of P. B. Shelley's poetic theory, which coincided with Mary Shelley's work on *Valperga*, the two were fellow students in Spinozism, as well as in ancient Greek and biblical texts. We can reasonably assume that these sources may also have shaped her own views of prophetic-poetic inspiration.

These journal entries prove not only compositional overlap, but also a significant meeting of the minds that speaks to the Shelleys' shared interest in enthusiastic expression. Mary Shelley's thorough familiarity with P. B. Shelley's poetic philosophy and with the readings that inflected it helps establish the *Defence of Poetry* as a likely theoretical pre-text for *Valperga*,[25] and granting interpretive weight to these texts' simultaneity has the further advantage of clarifying the prophetic functions of Beatrice and Euthanasia. Castruccio's remark about "how unlike" these two women seem has been adopted by critics who differentiate Beatrice the

[24] Percy Bysshe Shelley, "On Prophecy, from the Tractatus Theologico-Politicus, translated from Spinoza," in *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck, 10 vols. (New York: Gordian Press, 1965), VII, 273-74, qtn. from p. 274; hereafter "On Prophecy."

[25] Mekler and Rajan point to this connection (Mekler, "Broken Mirrors," 461; and Rajan, ed., *Valperga* (Broadview), 452n, 459n). See also Rossington, introduction, xxiv.

prophetess as different in kind from Euthanasia the Countess of Valperga (*Valperga*, 150).[26] Through her heroines, Mary Shelley collapses and then distinguishes the classical, biblical, and popular prophetic forms the *Defence* invokes. By engaging Romantic-era understandings of enthusiasm, she uses existing gendered debates about inspiration[27] to critique Percy-Shelleyan idealistic poetic theory and, more importantly, to present women writers as capable of the elevated status more readily granted to male poets and to the imaginative prophets with whom they share the mantle of "enthusiast."

The *Defence of Poetry* frequently references enthusiasm, marshaling classical and eighteenth-century metaphors of inspiration to construct an expansive definition of poetic genius that evades the vulgarizing forces of popular prophecy.[28] Shelley indeed blends poet and prophet: "Poets, according to the circumstances of the age and nation in which they appeared, were called, in the earlier epochs of the world, legislators, or prophets: a poet essentially comprises and unites both these characters."[29] Sidney had called the poet "diviner, foreseer, or prophet,"[30] but Shelley adds the distinction of "legislator," a claim he would repeat in that famous ultimate line, "Poets

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[26] *Valperga*'s earliest critics fixated on this phrase. See, for example, the earlier cited "Review of *Valperga*," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* XIII (March 1823): 283-93. Many critics, including Schierenbeck and Lynch, also take Castruccio at his word and focus on Beatrice and Euthanasia's distinctions (Schierenbeck, "Religion and the Contours of the Romantic-Era Novel," par. 16-18; and Lynch, "Historical novelist," 145). For discussion of the two women's relationships with Castruccio, see Curran, "*Valperga*," 107.

[27] Cragwall, "The Shelleys' Enthusiasm," 631-41; see also Smith, *Rebellious Daughters*, 37, 74.

[28] Cragwall, "The Shelleys' Enthusiasm," 637. See also Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, esp. 3, 9-14, 23, 25-30; Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); and Susan Juster, *Disorderly Women: Sexual Politics & Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), and Juster, *Doomsayers*.

[29] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, 2nd edn., ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, (New York: Norton, 2002), 513. An earlier draft manuscript also includes "deities," "seers," and "beholders" in this list, which would align Shelley even more closely with Sidney; however, these terms were redacted to leave only "legislators & prophets" to be fair-copied by Mary Shelley in March 1821 (Bodleian MS. Shelley d. 1, f. 76r rev., *BSM*, IV-2, 135).

[30] Philip Sidney, *The Defence of Poesie*, in *Sir Philip Sydney's Defence of Poetry. And, Observations on Poetry and Eloquence, from the Discoveries of Ben Jonson* (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1787), 7.

are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" (*Defence*, 535). Shelley also redefines relations between poetry and prophecy:

> Not that I assert poets to be prophets in the gross sense of the word, or that they can foretell the form as surely as they foreknow the spirit of events: such is the pretence of superstition, which would make poetry an attribute of prophecy, rather than prophecy an attribute of poetry. A poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one; as far as relates to his conceptions, time and place and number are not. (*Defence*, 513)[31]

In this passage, Shelley opposes superstition to poetry: superstition pretends to foretell, whereas poetry's atemporality elevates it above the antics of Joanna Southcott, Richard Brothers, and the vulgar, fanatical multitudes that followed them.[32] Shelley's enthusiasm thus marginalizes the spiritual deviations of Catholic and Methodist superstition at odds with his class standing and with his idealistic vision of the poet; however, his visionary poetics cannot escape those associations entirely. Shelley's ideal poet thus assumes a familiarly uncomfortable yet quintessentially Romantic position between elevated visionary and superstitious fanatic.[33]

Aware of her husband's restless contradiction, Mary Shelley exposes it in her fiction. It may seem counterintuitive that Shelley would use the historical novel genre to address a poetic theory espoused by her husband in essay form and exercised in verse; however, early recognitions of Euthanasia's potential as a feminized P. B. Shelley avatar by readers within or

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[31] Shelley's disdain for religious "superstition" may arise from spiritual as well as class-based objections. For a recent discussion of Shelley's "'occupation' of atheism," see Chapter 9 of Colin Jager, *Unquiet Things: Secularism in the Romantic Age* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), esp. 237-38. Shelley's draft implies an association between this "pretence of superstition" and a Hebrew model of prophecy: "such is the pretence of ~~superstition~~ the spirit of events; ?~~& a question of which the which~~ would make poetry an attribute of ?~~advocate of the ?Hebrew ( ) this is the mere pretence of superstition~~" (*BSM*, IV-2, 135). Shelley removes another reference to superstition in his later discussion of poetry's relation to morality (see *BSM*, IV-2, 171).

[32] See Cragwall, *Lake Methodism*, 190, 192, emphasis original; and Chapter 1.

[33] For further discussion of Romantic poets' enthusiastic associations, see Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 1, 3-6, 12-14, 17, 239-40, 247; and Andrew O. Winckles, "'Excuse What Difficiencies You Will Find': Methodist Women and Public Space in John Wesley's Arminian Magazine," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 46.3 (2013), 423, 427-28. Coleridge's consistent "desynonymization" of "enthusiasm" and "fanaticism" is an apt example of this anxiety (Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 32, 37, 76, 150, 164, 168-72; and Cragwall, *Lake Methodism*, 114). For gender implications in Anna Laetitia Barbauld's work, see Chapter 4 of Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, esp. 173-85.

close to the Shelley circle offer a hint as to why fiction proved the most appropriate vehicle for Mary Shelley's critique. Since P. B. Shelley's readership, including the devoted John Watson Dalby, would not have access to his *Defence* until Mary Shelley's 1840 edition of her husband's prose,[34] her fiction provides a meaningful if unexpected commentary in the wake of the poet's death. If Mary Shelley collapses the religious rhetoric and lofty poetics of P. B. Shelley's enthusiasm in her *Frankenstein*, she reintroduces and complicates that distinction, now with a clearer referent in the yet-manuscript *Defence of Poetry*, in *Valperga* through the poet-prophet figures of Beatrice and Euthanasia. The confident, frenetic, yet deluded figure of Beatrice represents in Mary Shelley's text the superstitious prophet; conversely, Euthanasia escapes vulgar association through the elevation of classical learning and political liberality. These two heroines, and particularly the telling compare-contrast exercise raised by their close juxtaposition in the novel, aid readers in registering the fineness of the distinction between the desirable brand of poetic enthusiasm sought by P. B. Shelley and its dangerous, lookalike cousin: superstition.

Moreover, Mary Shelley's novel reading also shaped her thoughts on enthusiasm and may have influenced her decision to broach poetic theory in fiction. Her most significant fictional interlocutor during the run up to *Valperga*'s publication was Germaine de Staël's *Corinne; ou d'Italie* (1807), which Shelley first read in1815 (*MWSJ*, I, 66-68, 88). The encounter spurred a longstanding interest in Staël; most notably, Shelley returned to *Corinne* in 1820, during the months of *Valperga*'s composition (*MWSJ*, II, 347). Three times that November, Shelley records her activities as reader of *Corinne* and author of *Valperga* in conjunction with one another: "Write — read Corinne" on November 11, "Read Corinne — Write" on November 12, and "Finish Corinne — write" on November 13 (*MWSJ*, I, 340). The proximity of reading

[34] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*, 2 vols., ed. Mrs. [Mary] Shelley (London: Edward Moxon, 1840).

Staël and writing *Valperga* underscores a connection observed by many critics.[35] Particularly, Lisa Vargo has argued that *Corinne*, along with Staël's *De la Littérature* (1800), helped Shelley link improvisational enthusiasm with Godwinian freedom in *Valperga*'s countess heroine.[36] Corinne prefigures Euthanasia in her Anglo-Italian identity and liberal command of an adoring public; Corinne's lovesick demise anticipates Beatrice's tragedy. Corinne thus becomes a touchstone for Shelley, who viewed her as the "embodi[ment]" of Staël's own "enthusiasm, her pleasure, and the knowledge she gained."[37] This description, from Shelley's *Cabinet Cyclopædia* biography of Staël (1839), helps situate *Corinne* as a product of "genius," and casts its author as a woman of "enthusiasm."[38] Both Staël and her signature heroine thus become touchstones for Mary Shelley's extended meditation on female enthusiasm; moreover, as Nanora Sweet has shown, both Shelleys engaged with Staël during this period,[39] making her a crucial influence on their thinking about inspiration in the *Defence* and *Valperga*.

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[35] Feldman and Scott-Kilvert note that Shelley likely read D. Lawler's translation, *Corinna, or Italy* (*MWSJ*, I, 88n). She revisited *Corinne* in December 1818 and may have introduced P. B. Shelley to it (*MWSJ*, I, 243). According to Clarissa Campbell Orr, Mary Shelley read *Corinne* three times between 1815 and 1821 (Clarissa Campbell Orr, ed., vol. III of *Mary Shelley's* Literary Lives *and Other Writings*, 4 vols., gen. ed. Nora Crook [London: Pickering & Chatto, 2002], 484n). For Staël's influence on Shelley, see Kari Lokke, "Sibylline Leaves: Mary Shelley's *Valperga* and the Legacy of *Corinne*," in *Cultural Interactions in the Romantic Age*, ed. Gregory Maertz (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 157-73; Lokke, *Tracing Women's Romanticism*, 36; Smith, *Rebellious Daughters*, 202; and Curran, "*Valperga*," 114.

[36] See Vargo, "'The mantle of enthusiasm,'" 171-72, 176n3.

[37] Mary Shelley, "Madame de Staël, 1766-1817," in *Mary Shelley's* Literary Lives *and Other Writings*, III, 484.

[38] Shelley, "Madame de Staël," III, 461, 463. Vargo quotes liberally from this text ("'The mantle of enthusiasm,'" 174-75).

[39] Nanora Sweet, "'Those Syren-Haunted Seas Beside': Naples in the Work of Staël, Hemans, and the Shelleys," in *Romanticism's Debatable Lands*, ed. Claire Lamont and Michael Rossington (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 162-67. See also Lokke, "Sibylline Leaves," as well as *Tracing Women's Romanticism*, 36; Smith, *Rebellious Daughters*, 202; Curran, "*Valperga*," 114; and Vargo, "'The mantle of enthusiasm,'" 171-77.

Corinne's female enthusiast is the most remarkable and remarked-upon fictional prefigure of *Valperga*'s heroines,[40] but adding Shelley's encounters with Sydney Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl: A National Tale* (1806) and *The Missionary: An Indian Tale* (1811) helps form a more complete picture of the literary landscape enabling Shelley's critique. These timely fictional encounters also help explain her preference for the historical novel, a generic choice that may otherwise seem counterintuitive for an explanation of poetic enthusiasm. Owenson's influence has been discussed less frequently by critics, but it may be similarly important in understanding Mary Shelley's choice of the novel as the most apt vehicle for critiquing P. B. Shelley's *Defence*. Between her first two readings of *Corinne*, Mary Shelley includes Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* and *The Missionary* in her 1817 reading list (*MWSJ*, I, 100). Both feature a female outsider of extraordinary ability: the Irish Glorvina, who became Owenson's social alter-ego, and the Hindu prophetess Luxima, a mysterious Easterner who stands opposite a Catholic priest. The harp-playing Glorvina is a national, religious, and poetic enthusiast variously labeled "witch," "priestess," and "syren."[41] *The Missionary*'s heroine, who displays "tender and ardent enthusiasm," famously captured the interest of P. B. Shelley: "Luxima, the Indian, is an Angel," he wrote to Thomas Jefferson Hogg in 1811.[42] Shelley laments his own inability to "incorporate these creations of fancy," "to embody such a character" as Owenson's Hindu prophetess. Shelley's corporeal diction here seems to foreshadow the project his wife would begin ten years

[40] See Kari Lokke, "Sibylline Leaves," 157-73; and Lokke, *Tracing Women's Romanticism*, 36.

[41] Sydney Owenson, *The Wild Irish Girl: A National Tale* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). For references to Glorvina's musical abilities, see pp. 52, 67-75, 97-98, 101, 116, 230, 234. Glorvina is called "witch" (133, 137, 160-61, 163-64, 171), "priestess" (135, 140, 143), and "syren" (151, 195).

[42] Sydney Owenson (Lady Morgan), *The Missionary: An Indian Tale*, ed. Julia M. Wright (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2002), 121; Percy Bysshe Shelley, Letters to Thomas Jefferson Hogg, July 28, 1811, and June 20, 1811, in *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), I, 112, 107; qtd. in Jacqueline Belanger, *Critical Receptions: Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan* (Bethesda, MD: Academica Press, 2007), 126.

later. Mary Shelley's own fascination with Luxima, though less acknowledged, shows in her continued meditation on othered or exoticized female enthusiasts, and it helps contextualize *Valperga*'s feminine embodiments of enthusiasm. Owenson's Luxima, unlike her more regulated priestly counterpart, Hilarion, is an "extraordinary enthusiast" and incomplete convert to Catholicism.[43] As with Beatrice, attempts at imposing orthodoxy have failed, and her youthful love for the hero tragically distorts her own unconventional enthusiastic practice.

Mary Shelley's earlier fiction shows her experimentation with prophetess figures and their relationships to the voices of inspiration. For instance, before she created the young female enthusiasts of *Valperga*, Shelley plucked the middle-aged prophetess Diotima of Matinea from Plato's *Symposium* and inserted her into *The Fields of Fancy*, a draft manuscript composed between August 4 and September 12, 1819, and later stripped of its dreamlike frame in revision as *Matilda*.[44] In *The Fields of Fancy*, Shelley's narrator and her spirit-companion encounter "the Prophetess Diotima the instructress of Socrates" while exploring the Elysian Gardens, the place where Earth's loftiest souls "retire . . . to become still wiser by thought and imagination working upon memory" (*Fields of Fancy*, 354, 353).[45] Diotima is "the principal figure" there, "a woman about 40 years of age [whose] eyes burned with a deep fire and every line of her face expressed enthusiasm & wisdom" (354). These powers come from "Poetry," which sits upon her lips and informs "her matchless wisdom & heavenly eloquence" (354). So eloquent is Diotima that the narrator cannot record her "words of fire" but must instead recreate their content from the "living

[43] Owenson, *The Missionary*, 126. Owenson republished the novel in 1859 under the title *Luxima, the Prophetess. A Tale of India*. For a discussion of changes between 1811 and 1859, see Cóilín Parsons, "'Greatly Altered': The Life of Sydney Owenson's Indian Novel," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 38 (2010): 373-385. Hilarion is also called an "enthusiast," but his enthusiasm is repeatedly described as "complexional," suggesting that his masculinity and religion make him more immune to its negative effects (Owenson, *The Missionary*, 73, 75, 101, 182).

[44] Clemit, "Introductory Note," *Matilda*, 1-2. Clemit notes that Mary Shelley transcribed P. B. Shelley's translation of Plato's *Symposium* in in the summer of 1818 (2).

[45] See Clemit's editorial note (*Fields of Fancy*, 354).

lips" of her earthly pupils (355, 354). Diotima's power seems to arise from her use of graceful, mantic postures to embody the persona of inspired prophetess, but the origin of that inspiration remains ambiguous: a "Deep & inexplicable spirit" gives her words, and those words have been translated through one or more listeners and the narrator in Shelley's narrative. The lack of clear dialogue markers may be attributed to the early draft form, but the effect remains: by the time readers reach the signal "Diotima ceased," they have spent several paragraphs wandering through her inspired thoughts and losing track of the voice that articulates them (358). Multivoicedness reinforces the ambiguity of inspiration, but a powerful, middle-aged prophetess becomes the physical repository of wisdom, knowledge, and divine truth for Shelley's narrator.

This brief history of *Valperga*'s ties to contemporaneous women's fiction illuminates a possible context in which a similarly character-focused, novelistic meditation on poetics might succeed; moreover, Mary Shelley's own experimentation with prophetess figures in her fictional experiments leading up to *Valperga* indicate that enthusiasm was for her a longstanding philosophical preoccupation and a recurring fictional trope. Using a fictional form, and especially an extended one like the historical novel, gives Shelley ample space to characterize Euthanasia and Beatrice as prophetesses and as complex female embodiments of poetic enthusiasm. The historical novel enables, even demands, embodiment of these characteristics in characters, and Mary Shelley seems to be acutely interested in the consequences of gendering these enthusiastic characters as feminine.

II. *Valperga*'s Prophetesses

Before distinguishing the heroines of *Valperga*, Mary Shelley identifies both characters as "enthusiasts" according to Romantic-era understandings of the term. Forms of "enthusiasm" appear twenty-eight times in the text, including five instances of "enthusiast." The connotations

are mixed, but each time the word signifies a person "full of 'enthusiasm' . . . for a cause or principle."[46] Euthanasia and Beatrice each receive the label twice, and the only other instance refers to Castruccio's mentor Guinigi. A "strange enthusiast," Guinigi "had an overflowing affection of soul that could not confine itself to the person of his son, or the aggrandizement of his country, or be spiritualized into a metaphysical adoration of ideal beauty" (*Valperga*, 26). In describing the novel's first enthusiast, Shelley broadly defines the term she will apply to her heroines. Guinigi's "imaginative flights" and "glowing benevolence" reappear in the ardent imaginations and fiery countenances of both women, and Euthanasia's motherly mien and beneficence as a ruler partake of the "gentleness" that Castruccio fails to receive from his counselor (*Valperga*, 26). Thus, the novel's early chapters use a male character to construct a broad umbrella for enthusiasm, but the ensuing comparison of Euthanasia and Beatrice uses feminine embodiments to demonstrate the complications introduced by gendered difference. Shelley uses both physical and behavioral attributes—apparel, fiery eyes, ecstatic postures—to link them notwithstanding their differences.[47] Moreover, the two heroines similarly acquire their enthusiasms from their parents, both in the sense of inherited ability and through education by guardian figures. Rather than polar opposites, Euthanasia and Beatrice represent different sides of the same enthusiastic coin. Mary Shelley thus lays the groundwork for a nuanced critique that reveals how narrow is the coin-edge that separates her husband's lofty poetics and the vulgar superstition he feared would taint his own expressions of enthusiasm. With her addition of

[46] "Enthusiast, n.," *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), accessed January 09, 2017, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/62880?redirectedFrom=enthusiast&

[47] Twigg and Smith also recognize both heroines as prophetess figures. For Twigg, "the rhetoric of martyrdom, divinity, and prophecy" connects the two characters in their "prophetic aspirations" ("'Do you then repair my work,'" 493). See also Smith, *Rebellious Daughters*, 200.

Corinne-esque characteristics and Wollstonecraftian feminism, she also shows the influence of gender on the differentiation of regulated from unregulated enthusiasm.

Upon first glance, Euthanasia and Beatrice seem as "unlike" as Castruccio presumes: Euthanasia, though a Florentine, replicates Corinne's Anglicized "golden hair" and blue eyes,[48] while Beatrice possesses the Mediterranean attributes of dark hair and "deep black eyes" (*Valperga*, 77, 127).[49] In apparel, though, we notice a striking resemblance. Euthanasia dresses customarily in a wide-sleeved, "silk vest of blue" from neck to feet, and "girded at the waist with a small embroidered band" (*Valperga*, 78). This image of Euthanasia in blue may inform Castruccio's dreamlike vision of Beatrice in the "capuchin of light blue silk" she wears when they meet (*Valperga*, 137). Later, for her trial, she dons the more iconic "short vest of black stuff," sleeveless and "fastened at the waist with a girdle of rope" (*Valperga*, 142); however, that readers (and Castruccio) meet her for the first time in a silk as blue as Euthanasia's eyes links the two women. Likewise, in *The Fields of Fancy*, Diotima wears "a simple tunic" fastened at her waist, along with "a mantle" over her arm and "a fillet" about her brow (354). While Romantic-era readers did not have access to this text to make such a comparison,[50] the presence of a similarly clad heroine shows the continuity of Mary Shelley's envisioning of female prophetic figures. Like Diotima, both of *Valperga*'s heroines also don symbolic headwear. Beatrice wears a "small silver plate . . . bound by a white riband on her forehead." The plate's inscription marks her self-styling as "*Ancilla Dei*," or "handmaiden of God"; she believes she is "the chosen vessel

[48] Euthanasia's combination of English and Italian characteristics prompts comparison with Staël's Corinne. Cf. Campbell Orr, ed., *Mary Shelley's* Literary Lives, III, 484n.

[49] Beatrice's hair recalls Diotima's: "her black hair was bound in tresses round her head" (*Fields of Fancy*, 354).

[50] Clemit, "Introductory Note," *Matilda*, 1-3.

into which God has poured a portion of his spirit" (*Valperga*, 129, 136).[51] Euthanasia's forehead is not emblazoned so, but her hair is "confined by a veil . . . wreathed round her head" (*Valperga*, 78). Here, the veil signals spiritual piety but also invokes the poet's wreath; the religious symbol marks Euthanasia's enthusiasm without undermining her social position, and the wreath intimates her poetic power.

Euthanasia's wreath also serves a "confin[ing]" function that Beatrice's headwear noticeably lacks; Shelley's physical details thus symbolize her prophetesses' subtle differences in the prophetic behavior they exhibit. When her "ardent imagination" overtakes her, Beatrice responds "in eager gesticulation," reflecting in her dramatic posture the significance she perceives in her own speech (*Valperga*, 152, 129). Shelley's narrator also observes Beatrice's "rich and persuasive eloquence," noting "her energetic but graceful action," which added force to her expressions" (137). Diotima's posture and movements are similarly impressive: "every motion of her limbs although not youthful was inexpressibly graceful"; however, it appears that when Shelley revisits the dark-haired prophetess type in Beatrice, youth renders mantic expression more energetic and volatile than Diotima's "eloquent countenance" (*Fields of Fancy*, 354). In her early prophecies and later anathema, Beatrice rises in transport, "point[s] to heaven," and speaks "with tumultuous eloquence" (*Valperga*, 137, 242). Even Euthanasia, who presents as a much calmer enthusiast than Beatrice, feels her "soul" likewise "elevated by poetic transport," and she strikes a prophetic pose during an impassioned speech for "the cause of freedom" near the novel's end: "Euthanasia raised her own spirits as she spoke; and fearless expectation, and something like triumph, illuminated her countenance, as she cast her eyes upward, and with her hand clasped that of her friend" (85, 314). Although her words bear political rather than religious import, Euthanasia's energy and physical presence are as striking as Beatrice's, and she inspires

[51] The Latin translation is Curran's ("*Valperga*," 112).

listeners with loyalty to her cause. Significantly, Euthanasia "rais[es] her own spirits" instead of waiting for divine inspiration. This active prophetic mode helps distinguish Euthanasia's secular goals as poetess-prophetess from Beatrice's more passive, religiously inflected superstition.

For both heroines, enthusiasm appears in the eyes and is symbolized through flashes, sparks, and flames of ardent imagination. Early in the novel, the "fire" of Euthanasia's "beauteous eyes" is "softened" by her "long, pointed lashes" and frank expression, and "her eyes beamed with a quicker fire" in the throes of youthful love (*Valperga*, 77, 100; cf. 19). Later, incensed by Castruccio's tyranny-tainted marriage proposal, Euthanasia's "eyes flashed fire," leading him to call her "wild enthusiast" (*Valperga*, 240). The connotations have changed. After labeling Euthanasia an "enthusiast," Castruccio's next phrase names Beatrice, juxtaposing Euthanasia with the "dangerous and wicked enthusiast" whose eyes "beamed as with inspiration" when Castruccio first encountered her and "gleamed with prophetic fire" just before the priests denounced her (*Valperga*, 240, 138, 129, 137). During her later anathema, Beatrice's eyes "shot forth sparks of fire" (*Valperga*, 245). Shelley extends this trope to Beatrice's mother and to the witch Mandragola, whose "red eyes . . . glared within their sunken sockets" (*Valperga*, 132, 227). These examples further acknowledge the trope of fiery eyes as code for prophetic inspiration and enthusiasm, and we observe that the loss of such fire signifies the departure of prophetic power. The quenching of Beatrice's spirit takes an obvious physical toll, but the change appears most noticeably in the fading of Beatrice's eyes: "her eyes were not the same; they had lost that softness which, mingling with their fire, was something wonderful in brilliancy and beauty" (341). All softening, all tempering has been lost, and Beatrice is left with a raw fire that lacks its former beauty. Later, even the fire itself has been doused. "[W]hat has quenched the fire of your brilliant eyes?" asks the Bishop, who remarks on their "glazed" appearance

(*Valperga*, 252). In both heroines, but especially in Beatrice, Shelley uses fiery eyes to identify enthusiasts, and the fading of those eyes to signify the failing or total departure of their prophetic powers.

Historian Susan Juster notes a proliferation of fire metaphors among Evangelical sects in America around this time,[52] but the eyes seem a special location for the concentration of fiery prophetic power. For an example from Shelley's pre-*Valperga* reading list, we might turn to Owenson's use of "kindled" to suggest that Luxima's enthusiasm is a spark fanned into flame. We see this fire concentrated in Luxima's eyes: "all the enthusiasm of a false, but ardent devotion, sparkled in her upturned eye, and diffused itself over her seraphic countenance."[53] Luxima's confidence in her prophetic abilities is described, like Beatrice's, as "false, but ardent," and both women's displays of enthusiasm begin in the eyes and spread to illuminate their faces. When demanding "the *Judgement of God*," Beatrice "look[s] around her with flashing eyes and glowing cheeks" (*Valperga*, 138). The fire spreads throughout her countenance, "inspir[ing] all who saw her with reverence" (*Valperga*, 139). The image also recalls the prophet of Coleridge's "Kubla Khan," whose "flashing eyes" and "floating hair" inspire observers with "holy dread."[54] Coleridge's prophet shows that poetic enthusiasm is always subject to interpretation and may be mistaken for vulgar superstition; literary and religious circles alike may cry "Beware! Beware!" as they suspiciously approach him who " hath . . . drunk the milk of Paradise" ("Kubla Khan,"

[52] Juster, *Disorderly Women*, 18; cf. 127-28.

[53] Owenson, *The Missionary*, 112.

[54] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Kubla Khan; Or, a Vision in a Dream. A Fragment," in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Poetical Works*, I, ed. J. C. C. Mays (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 511-14, lines 50, 52. For commentary on Coleridge's relationship to prophecy, and particularly on "Kubla Khan," see Mee's chapter, "Coleridge, Prophecy, and Imagination," in *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 132ff.

lines 49, 53-54).[55] P. B. Shelley demonstrates awareness of this slippery slope, and *Valperga*'s heroines reveal its especial danger for the female enthusiast.

Coleridge and Shelley's connections to prophecy depend in large part on readers' recognition of these prophetic traits; Euthanasia and Beatrice's received superhuman abilities are also figured in allusions to celestial beings of both classical and Christian religion. For instance, both heroines, in the prime of their youth and enthusiastic ability, resemble Homer's descriptions of the Greek goddess Eos as "rosy-fingered" Dawn.[56] Euthanasia's "rosy-tipt fingers" prefigure Beatrice's blushing in Castruccio's presence, "even till the tips of her fingers became a rosy red" (*Valperga*, 78, 149). Beatrice herself later compares their hands, noting that "the tips of [Beatrice's] fingers and [her] nails were never dyed by so roseate a tint" as Euthanasia's (*Valperga*, 246). More overt are Shelley's linkages to heavenly beings. The narrator and other repeatedly call Euthanasia an "angel" (see *Valperga*, 217, 240, 241, 247, 267, 314).[57] While Beatrice's celestial associations prove more ambivalent, she still "enchant[s]" Castruccio with the sense that she must be some beneficent seraph. After meeting Beatrice, he asks the Bishop whether it is "true that she was an angel descended upon earth for the benefit and salvation of man" (*Valperga*, 130). Castruccio imputes not only angelic but also salvific qualities to the prophetess, suggesting a tenuous connection to Christ. This link is forged more securely later when, after Beatrice successfully completes the Judgment of God, the people dub her "saintly Beatrice," "the offspring of heaven alone," and impute to her miraculous powers exhibited by Jesus in the New Testament. "They endeavoured to touch the garment of the newly declared

[55] Cf. E. S. Shaffer, *"Kubla Khan" and the Fall of Jerusalem: The Mythological School in Biblical Criticism and Secular Literature, 1770-1880* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1975), 63.

[56] Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Barry B. Powell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), I, line 466, XXIV, line 764.

[57] See also Carson, *Populism, Gender, and Sympathy*, 181.

saint," just as the afflicted woman grasps the hem of Jesus' garment; and "mothers brought her their sick children" as many a concerned parent approached Jesus to request healing for ailing sons and daughters (*Valperga*, 144, 143). Euthanasia also appears Christ-like when she grapples with the Castruccio's unfaithfulness and the disintegration of their relationship: "she took it patiently, . . . and hardly prayed to have the bitter cup removed" (*Valperga*, 185). Like Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, Euthanasia experiences betrayal and wishes herself removed from the situation even though she senses "she was doomed" to it (*Valperga*, 185).[58] Shelley uses Euthanasia's steadfastness and sacrificial nature, which imitate Christ's, to connect her heroine with Christian deity. Such allusions help characterize Euthanasia and Beatrice as extraordinary, even otherworldly, lending to their enthusiastic powers a sense of superhuman authority.

Despite supernatural ties, *Valperga*'s heroines attain their abilities through human connections—"enthusiast" identity in *Valperga* seems largely a matter of parentage, and the inherent dangers of enthusiasm appear readily in Beatrice and Euthanasia's maternal sources of prophetic inspiration. As Smith notes, both heroines inherit their prophetic abilities from their mothers,[59] but Euthanasia's enthusiastic bequest is tempered by the education she receives from her father. As her mother's daughter, Euthanasia's "foible" was "to love the very shadow of freedom with unbounded enthusiasm," "but she was no narrow partisan" like her mother; "her father . . . had taught her higher lessons" (*Valperga*, 78).[60] An embodiment of "wisdom's self," Euthanasia's father steers her mother's zealous Guelph politics into a more ecumenical view. He "taught [her] to consider the world and the community of man, or to study the little universe of

[58] See Matthew 9:20, Luke 8:44, and Matthew 26:39, King James Version.

[59] See Smith, *Rebellious Daughters*, 204.

[60] For another example of father-daughter educational relationships in Mary Shelley's *oeuvre*, see *Lodore* (1835). The titular character removes his daughter, Ethel, from the company of her mother and grandmother to educate her in their wilderness home on the Illinois frontier. The friend of Lodore's youth, Francis Derham, also tutors his daughter Fanny, whereas her sister receives a maternal education.

[her] own mind," practices essential for the reflective habits she maintains after his death (*Valperga*, 82). Prophetic heritage seems less a matter of education than of reincarnation for Beatrice, who imbibes unfiltered the superstitions of her prophetess-mother, Wilhelmina of Bohemia. The Bishop remarks, "It seemed . . . as if her mother's soul had descended into her," and despite his efforts "to save her" from her heretical "destiny," she remains influenced most lastingly by Wilhelmina and her follower Magfreda (136). "Poor Beatrice!" exclaims Shelley's narrator;

> [s]he had inherited from her mother the most ardent imagination that ever animated a human soul. Its images were as vivid as reality, and were so overpowering, that they appeared to her, when she compared them to the calm sensations of others, as something superhuman. (*Valperga*, 152)

Beatrice, like her mother, fashions herself as "more than human" (149, 132).[61] Both mothers leave enthusiastic legacies for daughters who scarcely remember them. These young women instead hear of their powers from father figures who attempt to modulate those impressions. In a move that reinforces rather than challenges gendered stereotypes surrounding enthusiasm, *Valperga*'s fathers (if we also include the Bishop of Ferrara) champion masculinized regulation as the cure to what Shelley figures as the previous generation's feminized enthusiastic legacy.

Shelley seems to have received a more complicated legacy from her own mother, who wrote extensively about feminine discipline as a powerful virtue of private and public good. As Stuart Curran has shown, Shelley's pre-1824 writings were "haunted by Mary Wollstonecraft's presence," and *Valperga* in particular shows the daughter's engagement with the mother's feminist politics.[62] Curran reads Euthanasia as a Wollstonecraftian "reanimation," an idealist whose education fuels her "devot[ion] to liberty," and Beatrice as an "object lesson" for the

[61] Mack argues that, for women in particular, convincing an audience that one is "both less and more than human" is essential for establishing prophetic credibility (*Visionary Women*, 108).

[62] Curran, "Mothers and Daughters," 587.

feminine emotionality Wollstonecraft decried even as she embodied it in many ways.[63] *Valperga* thus hosts competing maternal specters, and they intersect at the issue of enthusiasm. This intersection helps further define Euthanasia's idealism: Beatrice's lack of control throws into sharp relief Euthanasia's feminine restraint, a complex issue within Wollstonecraft's vision for women's advancement.[64] Shelley suggests that the female enthusiast may benefit from sparks of "creative inspiration," and may even use them for good, but she must not "fan the flames of a passion bordering on madness."[65] But Shelley's countess, Euthanasia, does not simply avoid madness by practicing self-control; she uses practices of self-reflection and emotional regulation to become a fair and beloved ruler, a public figure more in the vein of P. B. Shelley's legislator-poet. So, if, as Curran suggests, *Valperga* "reclaims Mary Wollstonecraft's legacy for a new generation,"[66] then it also modifies that legacy by situating feminine restraint as necessary for harnessing female enthusiasm as a source of public power. Shelley's feminocentric novel reveals the complexity and potential of women's inspiration, feeling, and self-regulation.

III. Regulating Female Enthusiasm

Shelley uses the greater scope of her historical novel to further explore how religious or poetic fervor can quickly turn to wild passion if not regulated by its possessor; she also uses her text to suggest that this volatility proves especially dangerous for women. The female enthusiast is caught between her gift and its potential to become a curse: in order to achieve success as a

[63] Curran, "Mothers and Daughters," 590; and Curran, "Valperga," 113, 114. Similarly, Rossington reads Euthanasia as "that combination of reason and sensibility" Wollstonecraft considered "the prerogative of women" (introduction, xii).

[64] See Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, vol. 5, ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler (New York: New York University Press, 1989), 151-52, 188-90, 231-33; hereafter *Vindication*. I am grateful to Jasper Cragwall for suggesting the connection to Wollstonecraftian restraint.

[65] Smith, *Rebellious Daughters*, 74. For enthusiasm and madness, see Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 29.

[66] Curran, "Valperga," 114.

writer, she embraces sparks of "creative inspiration" as they come, but she must take care lest unchecked enthusiasm "fan the flames of a passion bordering on madness." Regulation becomes for Shelley the key factor in articulating the fine line between poetic idealism and religious superstition, both of which are possibilities for her enthusiast-heroines. Having crafted these fictional women as foils, Shelley interrogates their different expressions of prophetic power: Beatrice is the undisciplined victim of superstition and unregulated enthusiasm, while Euthanasia represents the idealistic female enthusiast who possesses the agency and control needed in order to self-regulate so that she can enact social good.

Shelley's Beatrice—the specter of unrestrained emotion—represents the idea of the prophet as "chosen vessel," a superstitious medium with total confidence in her power but without the agency or discipline to regulate it (*Valperga*, 136).[67] "[W]rapt up in the belief of her own exalted nature," the young Beatrice is clothed, literally and figuratively, in her cherished distinction as "*Ancilla Dei*" (136, 149). According to the Bishop, "she seemed to dwell with all her soul on the mysteries of our religion" (Catholicism) and "meditated" on them "till she was filled with a sentiment that overwhelmed and oppressed her." But rather than being empowered by prophecy, Beatrice feels oppressed by it. She wanders through texts in "ignorance and enthusiasm," and thought her imagination is "active," it merely "confirm[s] her in her mistakes" (136).[68] Born of her misinformed enthusiasm, Beatrice's prophecies are "feverish" and "dangerous," rendering her "imposter! heretic! madwoman!" in the eyes of religious leaders (149, 139). Because she does not think critically, Beatrice regards her own ideas and "the

[67] For Beatrice's lack of agency, see Twigg, "'Do you then repair my work,'" 493. See also Mack's discussion of the women prophet as "empty vessel" in *Visionary Women*, 33.

[68] See also Charlene Bunnell, *"All the World's a Stage": Dramatic Sensibility in Mary Shelley's Novels* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 118-19; Twigg, "'Do you then repair my work,'" 493; and Smith, *Rebellious Daughters*, 203.

superstitions of her times" as eternal truths (152).[69] Perhaps most tellingly, Beatrice mistakes romantic passion for "heaven-derived prophecy," and it leads to her downfall: her "thoughts burning with passion" become "dangerous," not because of their inherent emotion, but because of Beatrice's "belief in the divine nature of all that suggested itself to her mind" (*Valperga*, 149; italics original). Beatrice "give[s] herself up to reverie," relinquishing agency to "uncontrollable transport" and "imaginative vision" (149). In these moments, Beatrice's "bewildered and untamed mind" hosts ill-begotten, unregulated enthusiasm (150).

Beatrice thus fits the definition of "enthusiast" most associated with religious deviation in the eighteenth century: "one who erroneously believes [herself] to be the recipient of special divine communications." This enthusiast, says Cragwall, is the superstitious foreteller who "haunts" the *Defence*.[70] Beatrice's "ill-regulated or misdirected religious emotion" associates her with the vulgarizing force of Methodistical enthusiasm that P. B. Shelley seeks to avoid in his poetics.[71] In his "flights of greatest abstraction, his involvement with rapture, vision, imaginative displacement, and prophetic transfiguration," argues Cragwall, P. B. Shelley's poetic style "recycl[es] the language of enthusiasm" and thus risks association with the rhetoric of superstition.[72] In Beatrice, Mary Shelley gives reign to this mantic mode, revealing the dangers of "unregulated enthusiasm," especially for women already stereotyped as vulnerable to their

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[69] For an alternative reading of Mary Shelley's treatment of superstition, see Carson, *Populism, Gender, and Sympathy*, 191-92.

[70] See Cragwall, *Lake Methodism*, 190-92. I borrow the word "haunts" from Mee (*Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 5).

[71] "Enthusiast" and "enthusiasm," *OED*; Cragwall, "The Shelleys' Enthusiasm," 639. For Methodism and enthusiasm, see Misty G. Anderson, *Imagining Methodism in Eighteenth-Century Britain: Enthusiasm, Belief & the Borders of the Self* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 49-50, 77-78, 125-26, 150-56, and 161-63; Cragwall, *Lake Methodism*; Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 13-16, 178, 214-16, 247; and R. A. Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion, with Special Reference to the XVII and XVIII Centuries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 513-48.

[72] Cragwall, *Lake Methodism*, 203.

own passions.[73] Beatrice credits as divine revelation "a prophecy, or rather a sense of evil, which [she] could neither define nor understand" (*Valperga*, 256; cf. 246-48). To borrow a common Romantic metaphor, Beatrice functions like that Coleridgean instrument, an "organic Har[p] . . . That tremble[s] into thought" only "as o'er [her] sweeps / Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze." Like Coleridge's "indolent and passive brain," Beatrice expresses whatever "traverse[s]" her faculties, lacking a regulatory mechanism to alter the strains ("Eolian Harp," line 38). Her passive enthusiasm leads to her victimization at the hands of destructive masculine ambition: "blasted to despair . . . and betrayed by all," Beatrice succumbs to madness and curses, sinks into "convulsions," loses her reason, and dies a mere shadow of her former self (*Valperga*, 243-44, 282).

Euthanasia's defining self-awareness and self-regulation differentiate her from Beatrice and prevent a similar fate; moreover, agency becomes important for comparing *Valperga*'s lofty enthusiastic heroine with the *Defence*'s poet. Euthanasia embodies the *Defence*'s modified Coleridgean lyre by maximizing P. B. Shelley's key caveat: "there is a principle within the human being, which acts otherwise than in a lyre, and produces not melody alone, but harmony, by an internal adjustment of the sounds and motions thus excited to the impressions which excite them" (511). Mary Shelley's 1821 fair copy of the *Defence*, corrected by P. B. Shelley, shows "internal" substituted for "instinctive."[74] The change is significant: an "instinctive" lyrical adjustment implies that a poet's harmonizing power is inborn, whereas "internal" simply designates a place, not a source, for that ability. This shift suggests that Shelley may have revised

[73] Smith, *Rebellious Daughters*, 203, 205. See also Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 15; Mack, *Visionary Women*, 84-85; Juster, *Disorderly Women*, 4-5, 11, 45; and Juster, *Doomsayers*, 94, 119, 153.

[74] *BSM*, XX, 21. Michael O'Neill confirms that Bodleian MS. Shelley e.6, is Mary Shelley's fair copy, and that Percy Shelley made the interlinear corrections (*BSM*, XX, 7). The previous draft form reads "instinctive" (*BSM*, XX, 85; see Bodleian MS. Shelley d. 1, f. 84r rev., *BSM*, IV-2, 103).

his lyre metaphor to allow for learned regulation: the lyre "accommodate[s] its chords to the motions of that which strikes them, in a determined proportion of sound" (*Defence*, 511). Essentially, Shelley's poet is both lyre and musician, much like William Butler Yeats's indistinguishable dancer and dance,[75] and self-regulation therefore affects not only the individual but also the poetic product. Attuned to the "ever-changing melody" of poetic inspiration, Mary Shelley's Euthanasia likewise becomes a poet-prophet who can "determin[e] the proportion of sound" through reasoned understanding, can improvise to create meaningful melody,[76] and can regulate that melody to ensure it is harmonious with the public good.

Like Beatrice's prophecy, Euthanasia's requires inspiration and, like P. B. Shelley's poetry, demands a conscious modulating of that inspiration. But the novel differentiates Euthanasia from her two counterparts with an extended discussion of her training as a self-regulated female enthusiast who leverages conventions of private feminine restraint in her public role as Countess of Valperga. Her control is born of classical education and strengthened by habitual self-reflection, both practices taught by her father (see *Valperga*, 78, 82). Early in *Valperga*, the narrator stresses Euthanasia's self-regulation of emotion: "Her beauty, her accomplishments, and the gift of a flowing yet mild eloquence that she possessed, the glowing brilliancy of her ardent yet tempered imagination, made her the leader of the little band to which she belonged" (70-71). Romantic-era readers would doubtless have encountered the pairing of "beauty" and "accomplishments" in other novelistic heroines; here, common natural and learned graces provide a basis for understanding the relations between inherited and cultivated attributes

[75] See William Butler Yeats, "Among School Children," in W. B. Yeats, The Tower *(1928): Manuscript Materials*, ed. Richard J. Finneran with Jared Curtis and Ann Saddlemyer (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 397. Mee describes Wordsworth as holding a similar "idea of poetry as an enthusiasm that could perceive the higher harmony of nature and the discourse of regulation within that" (*Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 217-18). For both Wordsworth and Shelley, the elevated poetic mind self-regulates in order to achieve a harmonious relationship with the world rather than being passively and uncontrollably influenced by it.

[76] See also Twigg, "'Do you then repair my work,'" 494-95.

of Euthanasia's less commonplace characteristic: enthusiasm. The full passage quoted above denotes Euthanasia's regulation with three instances of "yet," each of which marks a tempered enthusiastic tendency: "eloquence" that flows like Beatrice's; "glowin[g] . . . imagination" described, like Beatrice's, as "ardent"; and imputation of "enthusiasm" itself, which, as we have seen, skirts perilous territory in the context of Beatrice's prophecy. Yet each phrase also carefully avoids that dangerous potential: Euthanasia possesses these gifts *and* her own mind, tempering them into a milder expression that replaces passion with "celestial" thoughts. She uses these gifts to secure leadership of her peers, "walking among them passionless, yet full of enthusiasm" (*Valperga*, 70-71). And a later passage credits Euthanasia with regulating her own enthusiasm: she exhibits a "wisdom exalted by enthusiasm" rather than endangered by it, and a "wildness tempered by self-command" (*Valperga*, 78). Here, "self-command" denotes agency necessary for preserving self and society from the dangers enthusiasm poses to both.[77] Shelley thus characterizes Euthanasia as an enthusiast capable of reflection, deliberation, and action; or, to borrow Wollstonecraft's terminology, one who can "lay a due restraint" on herself (*Vindication*, 152). Whereas Beatrice's flame blazes unattended, Euthanasia's "creative fire" emerges from "her heart and brain" (71), suggesting that learning and discipline enable her to curb emotions that might otherwise mislead her into the madness that destroys Beatrice.

Euthanasia's introspective, self-applied restraint inhabits a unique place between Wollstonecraftian concerns about imposed social proprieties and Evangelical reflective piety. Euthanasia's prophecies, unlike Beatrice's wild ravings, involve "deep meditation" that creates a mood of "exceeding serenity," allowing her to evaluate and regulate feelings (*Valperga*, 220, 314). When she "feel[s] livelier emotions arise," Euthanasia's "custom" is not to unquestioningly

[77] See Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 23.

fan her enthusiastic flame, like Beatrice or Owenson's Luxima, but instead to "try to define and understand" her passions:

> Euthanasia was so self-examining, that she never allowed a night to elapse without recalling her feelings and actions of the past day; she endeavoured to be simply just to herself, and her soul had long been accustomed to this discipline, that it easily laid open its deepest secrets. Misfortune had not dulled her sense of right and wrong; her understanding was still clear, though tinged by the same lofty enthusiasm which had ever been her characteristic. (*Valperga*, 80, 251)

Shelley has Euthanasia examine herself, freeing her from the "severe restraint" Wollstonecraft saw imposed on women by patriarchal society. As an "heir of immortality," she "ac[ts] from a nobler spring" (*Vindication*, 215). Interestingly, the passage suggests that this spring may not flow only from secular sources, as Euthanasia's practice alludes to reflective customs often depicted in novels with stronger ties to Romantic Evangelicalism. We might think of *Mansfield Park*'s Fanny Price, whose "own thoughts and reflections were habitually her best companions," or, less canonically, of the heroine of Hannah More's *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* (1809), who "constantly examined the actual state of her mind" to prevent unconscious sin.[78] Whereas these heroines are demure to a fault, Shelley imbues Euthanasia's examination of conscience with a "tinge" of "lofty enthusiasm."[79] When Shelley combines these characteristics in Euthanasia, she creates a new type of female enthusiast, and, with Beatrice as foil, distinguishes her enthusiasm as a uniquely feminine "spring" that avoids both excessive zeal and oppressive didacticism.

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[78] Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, ed. John Wiltshire (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 94; and Hannah More, *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*, ed. Patricia Demers (Toronto: Broadview, 2007), 239. See also Laura Mooneyham White, *Jane Austen's Anglicanism* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 26, 72, 133-35; and Carson, *Populism, Gender, and Sympathy*, 189.

[79] The practice of self-examination discussed by the Apostle Paul in II Corinthians takes many forms in eighteenth-century Christianity. In the Evangelical Protestantism of Hannah More and other Shelley contemporaries, reflection was often solitary and took place outside of a church setting. Catholicism promotes examination of conscience before formal confession. For example, Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuit order, prescribed a "particular and daily Examin to be perform'd at three different times" (Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of S. Ignatius of Loyola, Founder of the Society of Jesus* [St. Omers: Nicholas Joseph Le Febvre, 1736], 10).

Shelley also differentiates Euthanasia's character from Beatrice's with a favorite genteel metaphor for feminine regulation: the lady's carefully tended garden. In Volume III, after Beatrice has been abandoned by Castruccio and imprisoned by Tripalda, she escapes to find refuge in the care of her rival, Euthanasia. Both displaced to Lucca by Castruccio's tyranny, the two heroines walk together along the palace-garden's "overgrown paths," and Beatrice tells Euthanasia: "I do not like to pry into the secrets of my own heart, and yet I am ever impelled to do it. I was about to compare it to this unweeded garden; but here all is still" (*Valperga*, 262).[80] Reflection is for Beatrice unpleasant, forced; it reminds her of her soul's disarray. As Jon Mee observes, eighteenth-century Britons read such discomfort as popular enthusiasm's tendency "to avoid reflection and meditation" (11, cf. 60-76). Beatrice cannot bear to examine her own soul, but she recognizes in Euthanasia a "gentler heart" able to recollect motives and, to borrow Beatrice's metaphor, to weed its own garden (262, cf. 150).[81] In recognizing that Euthanasia can weed her heart-garden, Beatrice implies that both gardens contain weeds. In fact, weeds seem inescapable for the female enthusiast in Shelley's novel, which catalogs the tolls that invasive species like superstition and excessive feeling impose on the prophetess's mind, sometimes despite her best gardening efforts. In calling up this difference of gendered regulatory practice recognized in religious and aesthetic circles,[82] Shelley's gardening metaphor attempts to fashion

[80] See also the Bishop's earlier description of Beatrice. Using adjectives that suggest more of a jungle than a garden, he laments that Beatrice is plagued by a "bewildered and untamed mind" (*Valperga*, 150).

[81] For a different reading, see Twigg, "'Do you then repair my work,'" 493.

[82] For women's gardening as a mechanism of regulation in the Romantic period, see Judith W. Page and Elise L. Smith, *Women, Literature, and the Domesticated Landscape: England's Disciples of Flora, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), esp. chapters 5 and 7; Eileen Cleere, "Homeland Security: Political and Domestic Economy in Hannah More's *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*," *ELH* 74.1 (2007): 1-25; Peter Denney, "'Unpleasant, tho' Arcadian Spots': Plebian Poetry, Polite Culture, and the Sentimental Economy of the Landscape Park," *Criticism* 47.4 (2005): 493-514; and Rachel Crawford, "Troping the Subject: Behn, Smith, Hemans and the Poetics of the Bower," *Studies in Romanticism* 38.2 (1999): 249-79. Contrarily, John C. Leffel and Stephen Bending read Romantic women's gardens as erotic spaces defying regulatory efforts. See Leffel, "'Everything is Going to Sixes and Sevens': Governing the Female Body (Politic) in Jane Austen's *Catharine, or the Bower* (1792)," *Studies*

Euthanasia's enthusiasm in opposition to Beatrice's, but it largely serves to reinforce their similarity.[83] Euthanasia has to strictly regulate her thoughts and feelings to achieve the "lofty enthusiasm" that confirms her political efficacy as Countess of Valperga.

Late in the novel, as Beatrice reckons with her downfall, Euthanasia responds to her companion's despair by explaining her own conception of the human mind and her method for taming its demons. For Euthanasia, understanding the "vast cave" of the mind allows her to harness "Poetry" and "Imagination" to regulate its powers (*Valperga*, 262). She becomes a mouthpiece for Mary Shelley's proto-psychological theory and a key link to the cavernous meditations that litter P. B. Shelley's *oeuvre*. We might think of the "dark magician in his visioned cave" in *Alastor* (1816), for example, but the most germane precursor for Euthanasia's monologue is "the still cave of the witch Poesy" in "Mont Blanc" (1817).[84] As Nigel Leask has shown, "Mont Blanc" links poetry with witchcraft and its cave with superstition.[85] The cavern also hosts the "unremitting interchange" between the poem's speaker and "the clear universe of things around" (lines 39-40). Whereas the universe "[f]lows through the mind" in Shelley's famous opening (line 2), it later engages in conversation. Shelley grants the "human mind" a measure of agency even as he maintains its deference to Nature: the mind "passively . . . renders and receives fast influencings" (lines 37-38). We can read this actively receptive mind as a

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in the Novel 43.2 (2011): 131-51; and Bending, "Mrs. Montagu's Contemplative Bench: Bluestocking Gardens and Female Retirement, *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 69.4 (2006): 555-80.

[83] Schierenbeck discusses Euthanasia's regulation as a marker of middle class reform and contrasts that with the failure of Beatrice's ignorance-driven superstition to "promote middle-class values of restraint" ("Religion and the Contours of the Romantic-Era Novel," par. 17-18). See also Twigg, "'Do you then repair my work,'" 493.

[84] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Alastor; Or, The Spirit of Solitude*, line 682; and "Mont Blanc: Lines Written in the Vale of Chamouni," line 44, in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*. I am grateful to Michael Rossington for this lead.

[85] Nigel Leask, "Mont Blanc's Mysterious Voice: Shelley and Huttonian Earth Science," in *The Third Culture: Literature and Science*, ed. Elinor S. Shaffer (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998), 189. For a different reading, see Anne C. McCarthy, "The Aesthetics of Contingency in the Shelleyan 'Universe of Things,' or, 'Mont Blanc' without Mont Blanc." *Studies in Romanticism* 54.3 (2015): 366-67.

stepping-stone to Shelley's poetics of harmony in the *Defence*. The enthusiastic mind may not be able to control its "unremitting" openness to what flows through it, but it can participate, even passively, in an "interchange" with the inspiring source. This interchange anticipates the skilled modulation of Shelley's *Defence*, and it informs Mary Shelley's meditations on active and passive enthusiasm in *Valperga*.

Euthanasia's monologue presents Mary Shelley's more nuanced view of enthusiasm; it not only shows the effects of passive superstition, but it also demystifies the regulation of enthusiasm's "influencings" and articulates a method for the female enthusiast to gain influence through that regulation. "I will tell you what the human mind is," Euthanasia assures Beatrice, "and you shall learn to regulate its various powers" (*Valperga*, 262). This statement is one of the novel's strongest proofs of Shelley distinguishing between her heroines based on their relative handling of strong emotion. Beatrice admits that, "in [her] soul all jars," producing a "most vile discord." Some external force "destroys all harmony and melody, alas! that may be found in your gentler heart" (262). From these confessions, Euthanasia recognizes a lyre in need of tuning; moreover, Beatrice's assessment shows how closely Euthanasia resembles the *Defence*'s poet-prophet. Her "lyre . . . produces not melody alone, but harmony" (*Defence*, 511). The musical wordplay heightens the contrast between the novel's female enthusiasts. Euthanasia's solution—teaching Beatrice "to regulate" the mind's "powers" as a musician forms pleasing chords—invokes their shared enthusiasm but highlights self-regulation as Euthanasia's special learned ability (262). Euthanasia immediately seeks to teach Beatrice her ways, answering the *Defence*'s call to reject "censure or hatred" in order to "teac[h] . . . self-knowledge and respect" (*Defence*, 520). Rather than judging Beatrice's weaker mind, Euthanasia "help[s her] recover a sense of

purpose and some measure of integrated identity."[86] Mary Shelley's female enthusiast thus "draws into a certain propinquity with the beautiful and the true that partial apprehension of the agencies of the invisible world which is called religion" (*Defence*, 512). In response to Beatrice's superstitions, those influencings of religion's "invisible world," Euthanasia takes up the mantle of poet-prophet as a compassionate teacher of self-knowledge.

In assuming this role, Euthanasia also reflects one of the key principles of Diotima's monologue in *The Fields of Fancy*: gaining self-knowledge in order to teach others. After reflecting on good and evil in the world, Diotima turns inward, exclaiming, "I will become wise! I will study my own heart" (357). Adding this context shows that Mary Shelley had been thinking about reflection for some time before she included it in Euthanasia's regulatory repertoire, and, more importantly, that she draws from numerous sources in figuring these methods. Not only does she seem to be thinking about Christian self-examination, feminist self-restraint, and poetic purpose, but she also draws on Classical philosophy as received through feminized speakers in Plato. Once Diotima "discover[s] . . . the spring of the [her own] virtues," she resolves to "teach others how to look for them in their own souls" (*Fields of Fancy*, 357). Throughout this monologue, in which Diotima spills out her goals in a stream of consciousness separated by frequent dashes but unbroken by harder punctuation, she makes clear that her hoped-for knowledge and her potential student are both still hypothetical. A single "proselyte" would spell success for Diotima: "if I can teach but one other mind what is the beauty which they ought to love – and what is the sympathy to which they ought to aspire what is the true end of their being – . . . then shall I be satisfied & think I have done enough" (357). Like P. B. Shelley's ideal poet, Diotima seeks to draw out beauty and truth; and, as *Valperga*'s several pre-texts and contexts show, Mary Shelley contemplates enthusiasm's relationship to beauty and truth from a

[86] Curran, "*Valperga*," 113.

variety of perspectives. Female enthusiasm draws together principles from Shelley's interactions with her husband's poetics, her mother's feminism, her own previous writing, and the religious and literary contexts of the period in which she lived.

Shelley's earlier prophetess remains in the dream world of divine inspiration as hypothetical reformation and instruction, but *Valperga* moves these enthusiastic principles into the realm of action. Whereas Diotima imagines "the mazes of the human soul" in her abstract lesson plan, Euthanasia's actual lesson figures the "human soul" as "a vast cave, in which many powers sit and live" (*Fields of Fancy*, 358; *Valperga*, 262). The placement of Consciousness as "centinel" may seem obvious—awareness standing watch between the mind's inner workings and external stimuli—but this first actor proves especially crucial for Beatrice. When passively serving as vessel, Beatrice loses this conscious guardedness, and those "quick sensations" waiting at the door easily "gain entrance into [the] hear[t]" (262). In Euthanasia's soul schema, consciousness is the first line of defense against passions that may lead to unregulated enthusiasm. Inside the "vestibule" of Euthanasia's mind "cavern . . . sit Memory with banded eyes, grave Judgment bearing her scales, and Reason in a lawyer's gown" (*Valperga*, 262). The latter two played important roles in Romantic-era discourses of religious enthusiasm: reason was often viewed as the Enlightenment principle against which Romantic enthusiasm was reacting, but in other cases it was a cousin of enthusiasm, a similarly subjective power.[87] The cave's vestibule also houses "Religion" and its "counterfei[t]": "Hypocrisy" (*Valperga*, 262). Beyond this pair lies the inner cave, which "receives no light from outward day; nor has Conscience any authority here" (263). Kari Lokke has read the innermost reaches of Euthanasia's mind cave, a space "difficult of access, rude, strange, and dangerous" (*Valperga*, 263), as a place of

[87] See Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 5, 35, 37; and Chapter 1. Mee points to Coleridge and Immanuel Kant as voices comparing reason and enthusiasm.

"[s]piritual transcendence . . . reminiscent of . . . Eastern mysticism."[88] I suggest that we might also read it as the realm of enthusiasm. Without light from the outer reaches, the inner cave exists in one of two states: "Sometimes it is lighted by an inborn light . . . . But, if this light do not exist, oh! then let those beware who would explore this cave" (*Valperga*, 263). "This," Euthanasia warns, "is the habitation of the madman, when all the powers desert the vestibule, and he, finding no light, makes darkling, fantastic combinations and lives among them" (263). Without an "inborn light" (a phrase suggestive of the well-known Quaker doctrine[89]), Conscience loses authority, and "the daring heretic learns strange secrets." This darker possibility recalls the novel's claims about Beatrice's heresy—she combines irresponsibly the Catholic religion she has learned from the Bishop with the superstitions of her mother's cult. But the inner cave also houses "the highest virtues" (263). Among these virtues are numbered "Poetry" and "Imagination," and "here they find a lore better than all the lessons of the world" (263). In Euthanasia's concept map, "Poetry" is more intrinsic to the mind than are "Religion" and "Reason," and as such, it supersedes the "lessons" of those knowledge systems. This claim proves central to the *Defence*'s ideas of poetry and to *Valperga*'s exploration of enthusiasm.[90] Euthanasia's assertion that "[f]ew visit this . . . strange and wondrous" chamber accords with assumptions that the enthusiast accesses parts of the mind untapped by most people (263). Her explanation acknowledges Beatrice's intimation that these women are special, and it offers a possibility for handling their unusual abilities.

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[88] Lokke, "Sibylline Leaves," 165.

[89] Catie Gill writes that the "doctrine of the inner light" was "central to Quaker figurations of the believer's inner relationship with God" and empowered women by promoting "ideological diversity" (*Women in the Seventeenth-Century Quaker Community: A Literary Study of Political Identities, 1650-1700* [Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005], 8).

[90] In the *Defence*, Shelley subjugates reason as "instrument" to the "agent," imagination (510-11).

Euthanasia's acute self-awareness, rigid self-discipline, and tactful approach to teaching reveal Shelley's views on good civil leadership in *Valperga*; the novel draws from the capacious definition of the poet-prophet in the *Defence*,[91] but it imbues that Percy-Shelleyan enthusiasm with a particularly feminine brand of self-discipline. Euthanasia's enthusiasm for "cause or principle" gains focus in championing "the liberties of [her] country"[92]: "[h]er young thoughts darted into futurity, to the hope of freedom for Italy, of revived learning and the reign of peace for all the world" (*Valperga*, 81, 19). Euthanasia's "religious and civil habits of action" help her avoid partisanship (*Defence*, 513), and her classical education fosters personal improvement that extends into the public sphere: "Euthanasia heard and understood; her soul, adapted for the reception of all good, drained the cup of eloquent feeling that her father poured out before her" (*Valperga*, 70-71). Mary Shelley makes Euthanasia the active recipient of knowledge, capable of receiving, combining, and applying ideas.[93] Euthanasia's reading acknowledges that poetry expands the mind to receive a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought"; moreover, her mind "incorporated the thoughts of the sublimest geniuses with her own, while the creative fire in her heart and brain formed new combinations to delight and occupy her" (*Defence*, 517; *Valperga*, 71). Euthanasia's privileged education, idealistic philosophy, and republican politics make her a musician whose strains of "wisdom and liberty" form "the echo of the eternal music" of the divine poet-prophet (*Valperga*, 81; *Defence*, 515). But these combinations do more than

[91] Euthanasia resembles the Percy-Shelleyan legislator, but no form of the word "legislator" appears in *Valperga*; however, the omission makes sense given that the Italian word *legislatore*, from the same Latin root, did not come into usage until the fifteenth century ("legislator, n.," *OED Online* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, December 2016], accessed January 18, 2017, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/107100?redirectedFrom=legislator). Mary Shelley maintains a historically accurate death for Castruccio in 1328 (*Valperga*, 325), and she avoids the anachronism (and inaccuracy) of describing any of the novel's political figures as "legislators."

[92] "Enthusiast," *OED*.

[93] Euthanasia's training allows her to absorb the "ever-succeeding pages of nature's volume" and "the later written poetry of Dante," both of which are noted by Percy Shelley's *Defence* as sources of wisdom (*Valperga*, 71; see *Defence*, 529, 513, 515, 525-28).

merely occupy Euthanasia. She listens, melodizes, and harmonizes with a broad range of ideas, making her a complex instrument of liberty for Valperga.

In Euthanasia, then, Mary Shelley reassesses her husband's ideals in light of women's concerns about and practices of self-regulation; in doing so, she envisions the female enthusiast as a different force of public good. In the *Defence*, the poetic mind possesses "an habit of order and harmony correlative with its own nature and with its effects up on other minds"; it links "the most delicate sensibility and the most enlarged imagination" with "[t]he enthusiasm of virtue, love, patriotism, and friendship" (*Defence*, 534, 532). As a female version of this poet-leader, Euthanasia applies understanding and fervor to form sympathetic relationships with constituents: "her mind acquired new dignity, and the virtues of her heart new fervour" during her reign, and she explores her potential, as leader, for "doing good" (*Valperga*, 71). She becomes a sympathetic ruler of Valperga by her "eloquence" and "sensibility." Curran also links Euthanasia's beneficence with her womanhood: she "wields power as a protective nurturing woman and rules through love not fear."[94] Though "[i]ndependent and powerful," "prudent" and "wise," she is also "so kind, that her assistance was perpetually claimed and afforded" (*Valperga*, 71). Euthanasia spends most of her time among Valperga's peasantry, taxes her citizens only to satisfy "the succour of their own necessities," and fights to "preserve [their] independence" in the face of Ghibelline takeover (71, 101, 212). In these policies appears the sincere, "undisguised sympathy" that "made her adored by her servants and dependents" (*Valperga*, 101). Euthanasia understands her place in the world as, in Percy-Shelleyan terms, "an atom to the Universe" (*Defence*, 532), and she approaches that place with feminine sympathy and self-control. Euthanasia becomes a new kind of inspired musician, a female enthusiast-leader attuned to the inner workings of her own mind and to the needs of those over whom she rules.

[94] Curran, introduction, xix; see also Rossington, introduction, xii.

In a novel filled with ambitious kings and ruthless conquerors, Euthanasia models leadership differently, and her male counterparts recognize her uncommon enthusiasm for liberty and justice. Her sympathetic leadership style makes her "one of [Florence's] first citizens," but her influence exceeds the walls of Valperga and extends even to her political enemies (*Valperga*, 71). For example, Arrigio is "overcome by her enthusiasm," and Vanni recalls how "her very name seemed to carry a divinity with it." Even Tripalda, who denigrates her on the basis of her sex, admits, "your rank and power have placed you in a situation to know the truth of things" (*Valperga*, 312, 202, 310, 209). She is a leader "more delicately organized," but not in the way that they expect of a woman (*Defence*, 534). She rejects Castruccio's veiling of "tyranny with hypocrisy and falsehood," vowing to "never willingly surrender [her] power into his hands": "I hold it for the good of my people, who are happy under my government, and towards whom I shall ever perform my duty" (*Valperga*, 201). For Euthanasia, governance is duty, not power, and she seeks, above all, freedom and happiness for her subjects. Even after she has been "despoil[ed]" of immediate political control, there remains "something in her manner, as if the spirit of truth animated all her accents, that compelled assent" (*Valperga*, 202, 317). Euthanasia's knowledge, sympathy, enthusiasm, and her regulation of those elements inspire awe rather than pity. She is an agent who, though eventually overcome by patriarchal forces, works for social and political good while she survives.

IV. Percy Bysshe Shelley Redressed

The "ideal republican" Euthanasia bears many similarities to Adrian Windsor, the Percy-Shelleyan "dreamer" of Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826).[95] The moral and poetic anchors of

[95] See Carson, *Populism, Gender, and Sympathy*, 189; Jennifer Wagner-Lawlor, "Performing History, Performing Humanity in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*," *SEL* 42.4 (2002), 761; Curran, "*Valperga*," 114; Kari Lokke, "*The Last Man*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*, ed. Esther Schor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

their respective novels, they also fulfill key prophetic functions. Adrian, like Euthanasia, emerges as an enthusiastic poet.[96] "[I]mbued beyond his years with learning and talent," he "entertain[s] republican principles" from an early age, much as Euthanasia did at her father's feet. Adrian's "vivacity, intelligence, and active spirit of benevolence" make him an admirable earthly leader, but his "spirit of high philosophy" gives him the otherworldly quality of prophet as well.[97] Like Euthanasia, Adrian is no mere poetic instrument. Instead, he "seemed like an inspired musician, who struck, with unerring skill, the 'lyre of the mind,' and produced thence divine harmony" (*The Last Man*, 24).[98] Lionel, who is often identified with Mary Shelley, experiences Adrian's influence firsthand and describes it in supernatural terms: "he had touched my rocky heart with his magic power, and the stream of affection gushed forth, imperishable and pure." In contrast to Moses, who extracts water from the rock by Yahweh's might, Adrian creates a "new proselyte" by magic rather than divine aid (*The Last Man*, 25, 26). As Protector of England, "the energy of [Adrian's] purpose informed his body with strength, the solemn joy of enthusiasm and self-devotion illuminated his countenance; and the weakness of his physical nature seemed to pass from him" (*The Last Man*, 194).[99] Adrian's enthusiasm, like Euthanasia's, depends on social goals, expresses itself in tempered exuberance, and transcends physical limitations of illness or of a female body. In both cases, though, the physical reflects the spiritual

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2003), 122; Twigg, "'Do you then repair my work,'" 485, 487; Rajan, "Between Romance and History," 88-89; and Ellis, "*Falkner* and Other Fictions," 156.

[96] According to Rajan, the Shelleys both saw poetry as "a mode of understanding (synthetic rather than analytic) that is not specific to literature" and the poet as a force of social good (Rajan, ed., Mary Shelley, *Valperga* [Broadview], 452n).

[97] Mary Shelley, *The Last Man*, ed. Jane Blumberg with Nora Crook, in *The Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley*, gen. ed. Nora Crook with Pamela Clemit, 8 vols. (London: William Pickering, 1996), IV, 19, 24.

[98] Blumberg and Crook cite Percy Shelley's "To the Lord Chancellor," 1.28, as the source of the quoted phrase; see also Anne McWhir's note (Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *The Last Man*, ed. Anne McWhir [Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 1996], 20). The language echoes the musician-lyre metaphor of Percy Shelley's *Defence* as well.

[99] See Bunnell, *"All the World's a Stage,"* 97.

when the eyes signal poetic inspiration: Adrian's eyes are so "bright" that "an air of concentrated energy was diffused over his whole person" (*The Last Man*, 197).[100] Adrian's luminosity recalls that of *Valperga*'s two prophetesses, but his philosophical mind and beneficent leadership forge a stronger connection to Euthanasia.

As in *Valperga*, Mary Shelley contrasts *The Last Man*'s idealistic poet with a cast of false prophets driven by delusion or ambition. Like Wilhelmina, Beatrice, and Mandragola, Adrian's counterparts are revealed and destroyed as imposters. The first false prophet, a grief-stricken "maniac," uses "frantic gestures and thrilling words" to "pou[r] forth his eloquent despair." Similarly produced by a "diseased fancy,"[101] his speech and gestures recall Beatrice's persuasive articulacy: "Shuddering, he stretched out his hands, his eyes cast up, seemed bursting from their sockets, while he appeared to follow shapes, to us invisible, in the yielding air." Lionel identifies these gesticulations as madness, not manipulation (*The Last Man*, 206). The astrologer Merrival also, like Beatrice, operates under a dangerous self-deception. Lionel determines that Merrival is harmless but does not "undeceive the poor old man," who later goes mad, "lift[s] his voice in curses," and dies in "the delirium of excessive grief" (*The Last Man*, 226, 238, 237). A final encounter with the superstitious occurs when Lionel and Adrian arrive in France to find a "sectarian, a self-erected prophet" leading a faction of "Elect" followers. This "imposter" "attribute[s] all power and rule to God" while actually seeking control of the masses, much like *Valperga*'s witch character, Mandragola, who willfully deceives others to gain power over them

[100] Lionel and Clara might also be considered prophet figures. See Lionel's prophetic vision and dependence on the power of poetry, and Clara's function as "good spirit" (*The Last Man*, 207-8, 215, 216).

[101] For Coleridge's use of "fancy" to describe undesirable enthusiasm, see Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 12, 176. For enthusiasm as mental illness, see Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 28, 135; and Juster, *Doomsayers*, 28-30.

(*The Last Man*, 292).[102] In the midst of such false prophets, Adrian appears as an "angel of peace," much like the "angel of consolation" that Euthanasia becomes in *Valperga* (*The Last Man*, 296; *Valperga*, 314). Just as many Romantic poets pitted themselves against the unregulated religious zeal of prophets like Southcott and Brothers, Mary Shelley contrasts the poet-heroes of both novels with the superstitious and false in order to solidify their statuses as true, inspired prophets.

Their political idealisms and conscious separations from popular enthusiasm make Euthanasia dei Adimari and Adrian Windsor apt fictional stand-ins for P. B. Shelley, but Euthanasia's gender difference makes her the more interesting of Mary Shelley's fictional reprises of her husband's poetics. But does that mean we should take at face value Claire Clairmont's oft-quoted remark that "Euthanasia is Shelley in female attire"?[103] I suggest not. In Euthanasia, Mary Shelley does more than merely clothe P. B. Shelley in feminine garb. She embodies his ideals in female enthusiasts who incorporate models from Joanna Southcott to Staël's Corinne to Mary Wollstonecraft. *Valperga*'s enthusiast-heroines affirm the *Defence*'s concern over poetic idealism being contaminated by religious zeal, but the novel explores this concern as it applies to women, and especially to women writers. Beatrice embodies the lurid fascination of Southcott, and Euthanasia shows women's regulation of similarly powerful feeling. Like Shelley, Adrian, and the *Defence*'s ideal poet, she also confronts ignominy. The *Defence* shows how culture undervalues these prophets' enthusiasm:

> neither poets themselves nor their auditors are fully aware of the excellence of poetry: . . . Even in modern times, no living poet ever arrived at the fulness of his fame; the jury

[102] For Beatrice as "imposter," see *Valperga*, 139.

[103] Claire Clairmont to Mary Shelley, March 15, 1836, in *The Clairmont Correspondence*, II, 341. See also Rossington, "Future Uncertain," 253, 254n; Rossington, introduction, xiv; Carson, *Populism, Gender, and Sympathy*, 23; and J. Wordsworth, introduction, n.p. Critics who compare Euthanasia and Percy Shelley include Rajan, "Between Romance and History," 89; Rossington, introduction, xxiv; Rossington, "Future Uncertain," 104; and Ellis, "*Falkner* and Other Fictions," 156.

> which sits in judgment upon a poet, belonging as he does to all time, must be composed of his peers: it must be impanelled by Time from the selectest of the wise of many generations. (516)

The poet-prophet exits tragically, leaving unacknowledged artistic and political work. Euthanasia and Adrian "shar[e] Percy Shelley's fate of being simply too good to live," and Mary Shelley acknowledged the similar deaths of her heroine and her husband.[104] In *Valperga*, the narrator laments how "Earth felt no change when [Euthanasia] died; and men forgot her," but the novel's last words recall her singularity as a prophetess: "a lovelier spirit never ceased to breathe, nor was a lovelier form ever destroyed amidst the many it brings forth" (322). Even if Euthanasia's reign is "erased from memory,"[105] her fictional story becomes, as Godwin recognized, the heart of Shelley's historical novel. Staunch opposition to tyranny and conscious distinction from unregulated enthusiasm define Shelley's heroine, but her reliance on feminine restraint makes her a new kind of poet to be "impanelled by Time."

While Wollstonecraft saw restraint first as a patriarchal control imposed on women, Mary Shelley embraces the *Vindication*'s more positive alternative and reconciles it with concerns about emotionality brought forward in P. B. Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*. Euthanasia's feminine self-control complements her enthusiasm, and she wields it against cultural biases to achieve private and public good. Rather than merely dressing male Romantic enthusiasm in women's attire to make it socially valuable, Shelley validates feminine models for using self-regulation to legitimize visionary experience. Euthanasia may not be remembered by the men who orchestrate

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[104] Ellis, "*Falkner* and Other Fictions," 156. We can also recall two Biblical accounts of men to whom scripture ascribes a disappearance rather than an explicit death: the antediluvian figure Enoch "walked with God: and he was not; for God took him" (Genesis 4:24, King James Version), and the prophet Elijah "went up by a whirlwind into heaven" (2 Kings 2:11, King James Version). For Shelley's commentary on similarities between Euthanasia and P. B. Shelley, see her letter to Maria Gisborne, 3 May (6 May) [1823], in *MWSL*, I, 336. See also Lauren Gillingham, "Romancing Experience: The Seduction of Mary Shelley's Matilda," *Studies in Romanticism* 42 (2003), 268; and Sunstein, *Mary Shelley*, 230.

[105] Lisa Kasmer, *Novel Histories: British Women Writing History, 1760-1830* (Madison, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012), 122.

her exile, but the identity she embodies—that of a self-regulating female enthusiast—outlives her, and outlasts the superstitious Southcottian model that Beatrice represents. In the years following *Valperga*'s publication, the women writers I discuss continue to explore possibilities and consequences of a Mary-Shelleyan female poet-prophet. This fictional enthusiast becomes a vehicle for the literary women who (re-)create her to explore the religiously inflected identity of the female poet. She survives questionable religious associations and challenges gender-based assumptions. She transforms in order to take her place as a serious artist, and she helps redefine enthusiasm's place within an evolving theory of nineteenth-century female poetics.

CHAPTER 3: DRAMATIC ENTHUSIASM AND THE MONOLOGUES OF LETITIA ELIZABETH LANDON

Tickler.
I love L. E. L.

North.
So do I . . . . There is a *passionate purity* in all her feelings that endears to me both her human and her poetical character. She is a true enthusiast.

-*Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, February 1832[1]

Letitia Elizabeth Landon exploded onto the periodical poetry scene in 1821 with two poems in *The Literary Gazette* signed under the mysterious moniker "L. E. L."[2] By 1832, when the above exchange between "Tickler" and "North" appeared in *Blackwood's*, Landon's early fame had been cemented by her sustained presence in the *Gazette*, her frequent contributions to

[1] "Noctes Ambrosianae. No. LX," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 31.190 (February 1832), 277, italics original; qtd. in Laman Blanchard, *Life and Literary Remains of L. E. L.*, 2 vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1841), I, 293. Blanchard incorrectly dates the article to 1830. *Blackwood's*' "Noctes Ambrosianae" series ran from 1822 to 1835 and regularly featured literary criticism and cultural commentary via dialogues between the fictional "Tickler" and Christopher North, the pseudonym of Scottish writer John Wilson (1785-1854). See David Finkelstein, "Wilson, John [pseud. Christopher North] (1785–1854), author and journalist," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), accessed September 17, 2018, http://www.oxforddnb.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-29668.

[2] F. J. Sypher, *Letitia Landon: A Biography*, 2nd ed., revised (Ann Arbor: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 2009), 3, 53. Earlier that year, Landon had published *The Fate of Adelaide* with her full name on the title page and had used the signature "L. E. L." at the end of the preface; however, this first publication did not sell well, and an air of mystery seems to have remained surrounding the initials when they first appeared in the *Gazette*. See, for example, Sypher's quotations from Bernard Barton and E. L. Bulwer (*A Biography*, 3, 59). On Landon's poetic debut, see Serena Baiesi, *Letitia Elizabeth Landon and Metrical Romance: The Adventures of a "Literary Genius*" (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), 82; Julie Watt, *Poisoned Lives: The Regency Poet Letitia Elizabeth Landon (L.E.L.) and British Gold Coast Administrator George Maclean* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010), 30; Yopi Prins, *Victorian Sappho* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 191; Judith Pascoe, *Romantic Theatricality: Gender, Poetry, and Spectatorship* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 237-38; and Daniel Riess, "Laetitia Landon and the Dawn of English Post-Romanticism," *SEL* 39.4 (1996): 807.

literary annuals, and a particularly compelling set of poems contemplating women artists. As Tickler's declaration suggests, Landon had an ardent fan base. North explains why: Landon's "*passionate purity*" links her with Romantic conventions of strong feeling and, more particularly, with the much-admired feminine sensibility of contemporary Felicia Hemans. This combination, argues North, makes Landon "a true enthusiast." North applies the label unironically, complimenting Landon and bypassing the many compromising associations of female enthusiasm delineated in the last two chapters; however, North's praise reveals another challenge for Romantic-era women writers, and particularly for those who wrote about enthusiastic feminine genius. That Landon's feeling-driven enthusiasm "endears" North to "both her human and her poetical character" shows how thoroughly he conflates the poetess with her poetry and, by extension, with the invented characters through which she speaks. Romantic-era audiences were accustomed to reading the poet in the poem, especially when it came to Landon's famous male counterpart, Lord Byron. Much like *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812-1818) enticed readers with a glimpse of Byron's life, Landon's poems fascinated the public with fictional avatars that invoked the poetess herself. Landon found these overlappings marketable during the 1820s and 1830s. But in the broader context of a developing female enthusiast type, which this dissertation analyzes, Landon's monologues articulate enthusiasm from within the identities and performances of inspired women: the poetess, the *improvisatrice*, and the prophetess. These poems show how religious and secular notions of enthusiasm clash and sometimes merge as second-generation Romantic women find new ways to embody feminine genius.

Landon's theoretical work on female enthusiasm aligns temporally and thematically with her formal experimentation in the dramatic monologue. As other critics have shown,[3] Landon's

[3] See Sypher, *Biography*, 9; Prins, *Victorian Sappho*, 193; Jonas Cope, "'A Series of Small Inconstancies': Letitia Landon and the Sewn-Together Subject," *Studies in Romanticism* 52.3 (2013): 368; and Tomoko Takiguchi, "The

early poetry anticipates canonical Victorian examples of the genre by Robert Browning and Alfred, Lord Tennyson. This chapter extends such claims by arguing that Landon's investment in female enthusiastic poetics and her pioneering work in the dramatic monologue mutually inflect one another; moreover, it uses examples from across Landon's career to show how this relationship drives her significant innovations on female enthusiastic poetics in the period. As she established her career, Landon used monologues to try on different versions of the poetess identity, relying on female enthusiast models from across religious and literary history. Her signature poem, *The Improvisatrice* (1824), is a sustained, multi-voiced inquiry into women's inspiration, and into the poetic forms through which that inspiration may be represented in art. In this poem, Landon interweaves speakers and performances, simultaneously embroiling herself in her speakers' stories and keeping her distance from their tragic ends. *The Improvisatrice* sets the tone for Landon's continued experimentation with the dramatic monologue as a safe vehicle for unsafe female enthusiasms; at the same time, this early poem helps her solve major conceptual and formal problems. As she returned to the form in "Erinna" (1826) and "The Prophetess" (1838), Landon increasingly abandoned narrative context in ways that anticipate Browning and Tennyson, and that reimagine the female enthusiast as a fluid poetic type capable of housing religious and artistic sensibilities. For Landon, the dramatic monologue opens up possibilities beyond the performance of speech acts by historical or fictional characters. It uses those characters to embody and interrogate a particular kind of experience and eloquence: the compromising empowerment of women's inspiration. Landon thus contributes to the history of female enthusiasm, to the poetess tradition, and to the history of the dramatic monologue a new

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Death of the Woman Artist: The Female Other in Letitia Landon's Dramatic Monologue," *Women's Studies* 36.4 (2007): 251-67; Glennis Byron, "Rethinking the Dramatic Monologue: Victorian Women Poets and Social Critique," in *Essays and Studies 2003: Victorian Woman Poets*, ed. Alison Chapman, 79-98 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), 81-91; and Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Politics and Poetics* (London: Routledge, 1993), 318-332.

poetic subgenre. Her enthusiast monologues offer at once a new way of imagining this productive intersection of religious conversion narrative, *Künstlerroman*, and tragic romance for Romantic-era women who stood to be empowered and undermined by female enthusiasm.

Applying current genre theory to these nineteenth-century poems aids in parsing subtle differences between the female Romantic and male Victorian forms of dramatic monologue, and in situating Landon within—and against—the form's overly masculinized history. Many genre theorists consider the Victorian dramatic monologue "a hybrid genre" caught between particularizing historical contexts and Romantic-esque "lyric spots"; however, as David Duff notes, the Tennysonian or Browningesque monologue borrows more than lyricism from its predecessors. What Duff calls the "combinatorial method" was already central to Romantic poetics, especially as theorized by Percy Bysshe Shelley and as practiced by Lord Byron.[4] So, if the interpolation of lyric helps explain the evolution of the Victorian dramatic monologue in the 1830s, it also informs Landon's poetry a decade earlier because the blurring of lyric and dramatic modes intensifies readers' conflation of poetess and speaker. Jonas Cope contends that Landon's dramatic monologues "challeng[e] the link between the 'I' and its author,"[5] and I agree to some extent. Both as a professing Anglican and as a vocational poetess, Landon would have wanted to avoid too close a connection with the feminized enthusiasms of eighteenth-century Methodism. But if Landon's objective in writing dramatic monologues was to uncouple herself from her enthusiast speakers, then that very choice of character seems to undermine her goal from the start. Unlike Cope, then, I am not so certain that Landon intended a clean break between her

[4] See Jonathan Culler, "Lyric, History, and Genre," in *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Virginia Jackson and Yopi Prins, 63-77 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014); Herbert F. Tucker, "Dramatic Monologue and the Overhearing of Lyric," in *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Virginia Jackson and Yopi Prins, 145-56 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014); and Chapter 5 of David Duff, *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 160-200. The quotations are from Tucker, "Dramatic Monologue," 150; and Duff, *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre*, 160.

[5] Cope, "'A Series of Small Inconstancies,'" 368.

fictional *improvisatrices* and her own poetic persona, but I do think she remained wary of the tragedy of what appears as a continual Corinne rerun over the course of her career.

In this chapter, I posit that Landon's dramatic monologues on female enthusiasm create a productive tension between her identification with and distinction from this set of tragic Staëlian heroines. Like the other women writers in this dissertation, Landon clearly values enthusiasm as a source and a marker of female genius, but her monologues on the subject reveal her difficulty with articulating a safe, fulfilling social position for such women. In each monologue I discuss here, Landon departs from historical novels like Mary Shelley's by writing through the bodies and voices of female enthusiast figures, not merely about them. This generic choice also allows the second-generation Romantic poetess to do something her lyricizing foremothers had not: to examine woman's spiritual, artistic, and social enthusiasms simultaneously from without and within, to take the female enthusiast alternately as narrative object and lyrical subject.

My inquiry into Landon's role in the beginnings of women's enthusiastic monologues takes shape in two movements. I first perform a reading of *The Improvisatrice* (1824). With its considerable length, the poem thoroughly psychologizes the individual improvising poetess; however, by articulating her ambitions, her experiences, and her tragedy through other women's songs, the poem also multiplies and universalizes that narrative. Landon's polyphonic frame narrative thus enacts the development of dramatic monologue from its lyric roots, as well as the development of the female enthusiast as an object of identification and critique. In the second section, I trace the female enthusiast in Landon's later monologues to show how she refines the form while expanding the definition of enthusiasm it houses. Poems like "Erinna" (1826) and "The Prophetess" (1838) depict enthusiastic agency by imagining the speech of one historical or fictional woman. Whether a stylistic development or a result of changes in Landon's publishing

practices, this move toward shorter, singular monologues strips away narrative layers to focus on a single woman's voice and the complications of using it. Landon's experiments with dramatic monologue illuminate the gifts, challenges, and tragedies of the female enthusiast while placing the poetess in a safer, more socially desirable position. She can lay claim to these extraordinary gifts as the poet behind the speaker while avoiding the immediate implications of those gifts for women in the period. By writing as the female enthusiast yet apart from her, Landon could rely on intense familiarity and identification to build a critique, all while maintaining enough distance and mystery to avoid becoming its object. As our epigrapher Christopher North suggests, "her human and her poetical character" overlap to display her "true enthusias[m]." Landon's identification with and valuation of her heroines' enthusiastic characteristics opposes her push for distinction from the tragic fates that had practically become a foregone conclusion for women like Corinne—for women like Landon.

In her critical essays, Landon theorizes enthusiasm in fairly standard Romantic terms: a mysterious concoction of inspiration, strong feeling, and poetic effusion that invokes divinity but avoids a particular theological bent. For example, "On the Ancient and Modern Influence of Poetry" (1832) implies by its very title a broad understanding of poetry's cultural contexts. The essay's definition of poetry intensifies that ambiguity: poetry "confess[es] . . . some superior power so deeply felt," of "higher impulses speaking . . . of some spiritual influence."[6] In other words, poetry's enthusiastic fountain springs from unknown yet lofty "impulses," which Landon conceives of in vaguely "spiritual" terms. They could be the inspiration of a classical muse, emanations from the Christian deity, or the loftiest creations of human consciousness. As we have already seen, Romantic-era enthusiasm gained much of its conceptual strength from its

[6] Letitia Elizabeth Landon, "On the Ancient and Modern Influence of Poetry," 161, 166; and "On the Character of Mrs. Hemans's Writings," 173, 175, in *Letitia Elizabeth Landon: Selected Writings*, ed. Jerome McGann and Daniel Riess (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 1997).

ability to collect these disparate notions of inspiration and genius. Given Landon's Anglican background, it seems unlikely that she would conceptualize poetic inspiration along the same lines as the ecstatic faith confessions common to the conversion narratives of eighteenth-century Methodists.[7] Instead, her "influences" may have more in common with the "fast influencings" of P. B. Shelley's "Mont Blanc" than with the vibrations of the Holy Spirit. Like her male Romantic counterparts, then, Landon uses enthusiasm's paradox to define poetry as a spiritualized—if not explicitly religious—exchange. It receives and expresses, translating feeling within the human soul with assistance from an unknown force beyond it.

If Landon argues for spiritualized model of poetic enthusiasm in 1832, she admits the gendered complications of that model in 1835. "On the Character of Mrs. Hemans's Writings" uses the example of Landon's rival to show how a female body complicates a poet's relationship to those "higher impulses." As F. J. Sypher has suggested, this essay is at least as much about Landon as it is about Hemans,[8] and nowhere is that conflation more apparent than in the essay's reflections on female enthusiasm: "The keen feeling—the generous enthusiasm—the lofty aspiration—and the delicate perception—are given but to make the possessor unfitted for her actual position."[9] By "actual," Landon seems to mean "physical," "social," or a matrix of the two. And there seems to be the rub. Enthusiastic qualities enhance the life of the woman's mind

[7] According to Sypher, Landon's family had been staunchly Anglican for generations, and she appears to have been "a regular churchgoer" herself (*Biography*, 14-15, 132). See also Blanchard, *Life and Literary Remains of L. E. L.*, I, 2, 260-61.

[8] Sypher, *A Biography*, 125.

[9] Landon, "On the Character of Mrs. Hemans's Writings," 179-80; qtd. in Blanchard, *Life and Literary Remains*, I, 259-60.

but endanger the female body in a patriarchal system.[10] Landon was no stranger to the barbs of rumor and scandal on account of her poetry and the relationships she cultivated to publish it, but here she blames the poetess's character rather than an unfair system. Landon understood the plight of the exceptional outsider, but she seldom speaks of it in *propria persona* in her poems. Instead, her female enthusiast monologues dramatize women's literary marginalization. In Landon's essays, conventional femininity exists uncomfortably alongside female enthusiasm literary ambition. In much of Landon's poetry, she tries to explain why.

I. Framing Female Enthusiasm: Landon and *The Improvisatrice*

In *The Improvisatrice*, Landon's poetic images of female enthusiasm hang on a frame narrated by the titular poetess, a young Italian woman who self-identifies as an extemporizing artist and has the tools to prove it: a lyre, a pencil, and a lover who fails to recognize her genius. "She is supposed to relate her own history," declares Landon's Advertisement, but with that history "are intermixed the tales and episodes which various circumstances call forth."[11] These "tales and episodes" include four narrative poems, two dramatic monologues, and a single lyric intrusion by the Improvisatrice's lover, Lorenzo.[12] Each is mediated through the Improvisatrice's voice, a fact foregrounded by the "various circumstances" that prompt her to improvise on her own artistic experiences. With its quick transitions from the narrative or dramatic to lyric,

[10] For Landon's bouts with prejudice against women writers, see Germaine Greer, "Success and the Single Poet: The Sad Tale of L. E. L.," in *Slip-shod Sibyls: Recognition, Rejection and the Woman Poet* (London: Viking, 1995), 259-358; and Sypher, *Biography*, 6-7.

[11] Letitia Elizabeth Landon, Advertisement for *The Improvisatrice*, in *Letitia Elizabeth Landon: Selected Writings*, ed. Jerome McGann and Daniel Riess (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 1997), 51. As Erik Simpson points out, Landon's claim that "[s]ome of the minor poems have appeared in *The Literary Gazette*" "undermines the illusion of a distinctly Italian compositional 'genius'" and of spontaneously composed songs (*Literary Minstrelsy, 1770-1830: Minstrels and Improvisers in British, Irish, and American Literature* [Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008], 62).

[12] Baiesi identifies the three main genres of *The Improvisatrice* as "the epic, the lyric and the drama" (*Landon and Metrical Romance*, 92).

Landon's poem "illustrate[s] that species of inspiration common in Italy."[13] Landon's protagonist has "all the loveliness, vivid feeling, and genius" of the Italian improvising poets, represented in the British imagination by Germaine de Staël's *Corinne, or Italy* (1807).[14] Like Corinne, the Improvisatrice's affiliation with this particularly Italian mode makes her a foreign object of fascination—a woman of genius familiar to but removed from Landon and her audience.

Most nineteenth-century readers either admired *The Improvisatrice*'s intricate frame or lamented its lack of narrative cohesiveness; indeed, recent criticism falls along similar lines. Some critics have viewed treatment of the poem's "repetitive" structure as "perfunctory," but others value the experimental quality of Landon's poem.[15] Since I read *The Improvisatrice* as Landon's first female enthusiast monologue, I view structural experimentation as crucial to her

[13] Landon, Advertisement, 51.

[14] Landon, Advertisement, 51. For Landon and the Corinne myth, see Kari Lokke, "British Legacies of *Corinne* and the Commercialization of Enthusiasm," in *Staël's Philosophy of the Passions: Sensibility, Society, and the Sister Arts*, ed. Tili Boon Cuillé and Karyna Szmurlo (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2013), 172, 178; Angela Esterhammer, "The Scandal of Sincerity: Wordsworth, Byron, Landon," in *Romanticism, Sincerity and Authenticity*, ed. Tim Milnes and Kerry Sinanan (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 108-9; Baiesi, *Landon and Metrical Romance*, 75-76, 83, 89-91; Watt, *Poisoned Lives*, 34; Claire Knowles, *Sensibility and Female Poetic Tradition, 1780-1960: The Legacy of Charlotte Smith* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 100, 106; Sypher, *Biography*, 43-44; Simpson, *Literary Minstrelsy*, 59, 62-64; Angela Esterhammer, *Romanticism and Improvisation, 1750-1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 97; Reynolds, *The Sappho History*, 110-11; Riess, "The Dawn of Post-Romanticism," 814-18; Tricia Lootens, "Receiving the Legend, Rethinking the Writer: Letitia Landon and the Poetess Tradition," in *Romanticism and Women Poets: Opening the Doors of Reception*, ed. Harriet Kramer Linkin and Stephen C. Behrendt (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 243; Pascoe, *Romantic Theatricality*, 234; Angela Leighton, *Victorian Woman Poets: Writing Against the Heart* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993), 47, cf. 58-60; Glennis Stephenson, "Letitia Landon and the Victorian Improvisatrice: The Construction of L.E.L.," *Victorian Poetry* 30.1 (1992): 5; and McGann and Riess, eds., *Letitia Elizabeth Landon: Selected Writings*, 272-73n8.

[15] For critical frustration with Landon's structure, see Kate Singer, "Landon: In Sound and Noise," in *Multi-Media Romanticisms*, *Romantic Circles Praxis Series* (2016), par. 12, last updated November 2016, https://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/multi-media/praxis.2016.multi-media.singer.html. See also Katherine Montwieler, "Laughing at Love: L.E.L. and the Embellishment of Eros," *Érudit* 29-30 (2003): pars. 13-16, last updated February 20, 2004, https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/ron/2003-n29-30-ron695/007717ar/; Margaret Reynolds, *The Sappho History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 112-13; Anya Taylor, "Romantic *Improvisatori*: Coleridge, L.E.L., and the Difficulties of Loving," *Philological Quarterly* 79.4 (2000): 504; Harriet K. Linkin, "Romantic aesthetics in Mary Tighe and Letitia Landon: How women poets recuperate the gaze," *European Romantic Review* 7.2 (1997): 174, 178-79; Stephenson, "The Construction of L.E.L.," 7, 11. For *The Improvisatrice* as formal experiment, see G. Byron, "Rethinking the Dramatic Monologue," 81-91; and Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry*, 318-32. Additionally, Angela Esterhammer has noted Landon's "first-person, de-historicized narrative[s]" (*Romanticism and Improvisation*, 98); and Tomoko Takiguchi has read "A History of the Lyre," published slightly later, in 1828, as a dramatic monologue ("The Death of the Woman Artist," 251-67).

synchronized development of poetic form and enthusiastic character. The poem's extended interplay between lyric and dramatic modes brings to life Landon's main enthusiastic speaker, who performs a "complex, fragmented, and contextualised representation of subjectivity."[16] In other words, the dramatic monologue's transformation of lyric speaker into character grants the Improvisatrice—and Landon herself—a temporary poetic distance to safely interrogate gendered claims to enthusiasm, as well as the social costs of accessing its "viewless powers."[17]

The Improvisatrice claims for its speaker these enthusiastic, even supernatural abilities while continuing the distancing work of Landon's Advertisement. The opening lines "signa[l] that we should not conflate poet and speaker"[18] by reiterating their national difference:

> I AM a daughter of that land,
> Where the poet's lip and the painter's hand
> Are most divine, — where the earth and sky,
> Are picture both and poetry —
> I am of Florence.[19]

Invoking "that land" places the Improvisatrice's memory far from the present setting, suggesting a Corinne-inverse by transplanting the woman artist from Italy to a less hospitable climate. Both "I am" statements announce the speaker's parentage to an auditor who likely does not share it. They also assert her subjectivity: she authorizes and tells her own history with "divine" powers. For one nineteenth-century critic, this enthusiasm links Staël's heroine and Landon's: "You see

[16] G. Byron, "Rethinking the Dramatic Monologue," 81. Baiesi reads the dramatic monologue as essential for conveying the national "doubleness of the main character," who asserts her dual Italianness and Englishness by "lend[ing] her voice" to a series of female speakers before "regain[ing] possession of her autobiographical narration" (*Landon and Metrical Romance*, 91).

[17] Katherine Montwieler has argued for bibliographical features as the main strategy of separation in this text, but I locate the crux of Landon's identification paradox in her choice of genre ("Laughing at Love," pars. 6-16).

[18] G. Byron, "Rethinking the Dramatic Monologue," 88-89.

[19] Letitia Elizabeth Landon, "From *The Improvisatrice*," in *Letitia Elizabeth Landon: Selected Writings*, ed. Jerome McGann and Daniel Riess, 51-81 (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 1997), lines 1-5; hereafter cited parenthetically. McGann and Riess include selections, which I have supplemented with their copy text, Landon's fifth edition.

before you the young enthusiast, destined to be her country's future Corinne."[20] In these early lines, visions of a "childhood passed 'mid radiant things" focus on the Improvisatrice's creative awakening (line 9).[21] Italy's "wild and passionate" songs spur her artistic "Genius," but gender stereotypes undermine that claim: "My power was but a woman's power" (lines 26-28).[22] Landon reinforces the distinction by locating the Improvisatrice's power in her "full and burning heart" rather than her poet's head (line 33). A major calling card of the female enthusiast, this quality establishes the Improvisatrice's connection to the speakers of her nested monologues.

Landon's poem organizes these monologues by imagining a gallery space where the Improvisatrice collects other women's songs. The motif also serves as meta-commentary on Landon's own fascination with reimagining a particular kind of feminine artistic experience through historical or fictional women. The first painting is a Petrarchan blazon, but the second depicts a woman in the position of poet, not object.[23] Interestingly, Landon's speaker at first maintains that Petrarchan mode, describing Sappho before naming her. "My next was of a minstrel too," she writes, "Who proved what woman's hand might do, / When, true to the heart pulse, it woke / The harp" (lines 113-16). These lines evoke previous reflections on "woman's power," but now they focus on the loss of that power as a dramatic setup to Sappho's farewell:

> Her head was bending down,
> As if in weariness, and near,
> But unworn, was a laurel crown.

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[20] S[arah] S[heppard], *Characteristics of the Genius and Writings of L. E. L. with Illustrations from Her Works, and from Personal Recollections* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longman, 1841), 36.

[21] One reason Landon's close friends may have identified her with the Improvisatrice was her tendency "to dwell upon scenes which awakened her first burst of song" (Emma Roberts, "Memoir of L. E. L.," in *The Zenana, and Minor Poems of L. E. L.* [London: Fisher, Son, & Co., 1839], 9). This passage could also be read as an allusion to William Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" (1807), or as a prefigure of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856).

[22] See Linkin, "Romantic aesthetics," 173.

[23] See Reynolds, *The Sappho History*, 113: and Linkin, "Romantic aesthetics," 174.

She was not beautiful, . . .
There was a shade upon her dark,
Large, floating eyes, as if each spark
Of minstrel ecstacy [*sic*] was fled,
Yet leaving them no tears to shed. (lines 116-19, 123-26)

In Sappho's decline we see the embers of her enthusiasm: the once-sparkling eyes hearken to a Coleridgean model—recall the "flashing eyes" and "floating hair" of "Kubla Khan"'s fearsome poet-prophet.[24] Sappho has literally cast off her laurel crown, but the Improvisatrice reads in her own art a symbolic action: "I deemed, that of lyre, life, and love / She was a long, last farewell taking" (lines 137-38). The frame's gloss encourages readers to overhear Sappho's lyric, her "latest, wildest song" (line 140), as mediated by the Improvisatrice's contextualizing visual art.

Landon's monologue, like many Victorian examples, dramatizes the song of a classical figure and incorporates lyrical elements in service of performative speech. Readers of "Sappho's Song" overhear her refrain in a particularized setting revealed by the fictional painting on the gallery wall. This visual inspiration reflects Landon's own interest in images as noted by early critics. "[P]ictures . . . seem[ed] to speak to her soul!" writes Sarah Shepherd, who praises Landon's ability to "seize on some interesting characteristic in the painting or engraving before her, and inspire it with new life, till that pictured scene spread before you in bright association with some touching history or spirit-stirring poem."[25] Landon's pictorial inclination anticipates Robert Browning's, as exemplified by poems like "Andrea del Sarto" and "My Last Duchess," and fulfills a key feature of dramatic monologue: the exploration and expansion of a character

[24] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Kubla Khan; Or, a Vision in a Dream. A Fragment," in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Poetical Works*, ed. J. C. C. Mays, I, 511-14 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), lines 50, 52. See also Chapter 2.

[25] Sheppard, *Genius and Writings*, 18. Landon's frequent contributions to gift books, what Sheppard calls "her literary vocation of illustrating pictures," is worth noting here. For Landon's contributions to and editorship of gift books and literary annuals, see Watt, *Poisoned Lives*, 37-38, 60, 133-34; Cope, "Letitia Landon and the Sewn-Together Subject," 365; Riess, "The Dawn of Post-Romanticism," 819-23; and Leighton, *Victorian Woman Poets*, 49-51.

from limited historical or pictorial material.[26] Her knack for "forming and tracing out . . . scenes, circumstances and characters" evinces itself not least in the ways her Improvisatrice, the poet's poet, skillfully and self-consciously creates and performing instances of dramatic monologue.[27]

Landon develops her Improvisatrice as a skilled poet—and as an enthusiast—by emphasizing the lyric features of her first monologue. "Sappho's Song" is a rhymed, personal reflection that "combin[es] . . . indirection and address."[28] It apostrophizes Sappho's lute and her former lover, which symbolize the two movements of Sappho's tragedy[29] and contextualize it within the discourse of female enthusiasm. "FAREWELL, my lute!" Sappho begins; "would that I / Had never waked thy burning chords!" (lines 141-42). As representative of Sappho's poetic skill, the lute enables her performative renunciation by posing as dramatic auditor:

> Yet wherefore, wherefore should I blame
> Thy power, thy spell, my gentlest lute?
> I should have been the wretch I am,
> Had every cord of thine been mute. (lines 145-48)

The repetitions of "thy" and "thine" reinforce the song's apostrophic quality, but Sappho's indecision is most poignant in her reflection on enthusiasm—the lute becomes merely a lyric construct, a "projectio[n] of the self" to "foreground the poetic act."[30] The poisonous sighs and feverish words of lines 143-44 belong to the enthusiast rather than to her instrument; moreover, Stanza 2 acknowledges Stanza 1's displacement when it exonerates the lute and, by extension, absolves the female enthusiast of culpability for the downfall her song recounts.

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[26] See Culler, "Lyric, History, and Genre," 75; and Tucker, "Dramatic Monologue," 145, 150.

[27] Sheppard, *Genius and Writings*, 32, cf. 145. Recall the "various circumstances" in Landon's Advertisement (51).

[28] Culler, "Lyric, History, and Genre," 67.

[29] Leighton suggests that Phaon may be the hidden male onlooker of here (*Victorian Woman Poets*, 60). For a reproduction of William Bell Scott's dire accompanying illustration for an 1873 edition of Landon's *Poetical Works*, see Prins, *Victorian Sappho*, 196.

[30] Culler, "Lyric, History, and Genre," 70. For an alternative reading of these lines, see Prins, *Victorian Sappho*, 194.

Landon's displacement allows her dramatized Sappho to accept the "woman's power" that Landon's Improvisatrice seeks while blaming Fate and faithlessness for her demise (line 147). She even goes so far as to blame her love, Phaon, for the enthusiastic qualities she had earlier linked to the lute: "If song be past, and hope undone, / And pulse, and head, and heart, are flame; / It is thy work, thou faithless one!" (lines 153-55). The flame signifies destruction but also the poetess's enthusiasm of body ("pulse"), mind ("head"), and soul ("heart").[31] The apostrophe invokes and yet denies Sappho's lover, ending instead with a "glorious grave" for the poetess (line 159). As fitting as this qualified triumph may seem, we must recall that these apostrophes do not belong to the real Sappho. Like the nested poem's visual and temporal context, they are the creation of Landon's improvising speaker, who is the creation of Landon herself. The scene, the words, the ABAB rhymes, and even the title "Sappho's Song" signal that lyric exists in spots within a monologue of the Improvisatrice's own enthusiastic production.

As "Sappho's Song" ends and the frame resumes, Sappho's meditations on enthusiasm tincture those of the Improvisatrice. Locational change again signals a new improvisation. "FLORENCE!" and its gallery now exist as memories, but also as sites of secularized worship: "with what idolatry / I've lingered in thy radiant halls, / Worshipping" (lines 161-63). The Improvisatrice becomes a priestess of "the deep soul of poesy" as "dreams of song flas[h] on [her] brain" (lines 181, 169). Enthralled by her own sense of enthusiastic power, she accepts and "nourishe[s]" the inspiration of "each wild, / High thought" raised to her mind (lines 185-86). Her lofty thoughts are filled with potential. Not yet consumed like Sappho's, they are instead on the verge of "fire" so "unquenchable" that only a volcano metaphor will do (lines 188, 190). The

[31] For the use of fire metaphors to signify religious zeal in this period, see Susan Juster, *Disorderly Women: Sexual Politics & Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 18; cf. 127-28; and Chapter 2.

Improvisatrice aligns her history with Sappho's through their lutes, but with a crucial difference. Whereas we find Sappho relinquishing her instrument, we see the Improvisatrice taking hers up:

> such an hour
> Had ever influence on my soul,
> And raised my sweetest minstrel power.
> I took my lute[.] (lines 202-5)

Landon mixes passive and active voice to depict a female enthusiast caught between those two key modes of enthusiasm: inspiration and poetic effusion. The speaker receives the moment's "influence," and her "minstrel power"—that force to which Landon returns again and again—is raised by external stimuli rather than by her own will. But the act of expression remains within her control. With "I took my lute," Landon departs from the winding, passive constructions of previous lines and propels the speaker to recognize the complex source of her power. Though invigorated by Sapphic enthusiasm, the Improvisatrice emphatically claims her instrument and, by extension, embraces her role as enthusiast—at least for now. Eager to replicate Sappho's enthusiastic qualities, the Improvisatrice seems content to ignore the full implications of Sappho's tragedy.[32] Landon's close juxtaposition of curated dramatic monologues with the poem's lyric frame thus reveals the danger of privileging sentiment over narrative.

The Improvisatrice becomes increasingly aware of enthusiasm's consequences as the ground of her narrative shifts from Sapphic agency to Sapphic loss of agency upon meeting her own Phaon: Lorenzo. This conflation of divine or poetic inspiration with the impulses of romantic love, which we have seen in Mary Shelley's Beatrice, is a common trope in Landon's early monologues. She tends to only meaningfully characterize one figure: the lovelorn female speaker who embodies the usual set of enthusiastic qualities and must deal with their

[32] See also Sheppard, *Genius and Writings*, 35.

consequences.[33] Often the male beloved is not present; when he is, he falls flat. One of the advantages of *The Improvisatrice*'s length is that it provides space for Landon to develop her speaker's love interest, Lorenzo, and to meditate on how a male enthusiast experiences this tragic love story differently than the woman who improvises about it. Lorenzo possesses many of the enthusiastic features the Improvisatrice has recognized in Petrarch, in Sappho's portrait, and in herself. Indeed, he possesses many of the features Landon criticizes in later essays. The Improvisatrice recounts falling in love with "a dark and flashing eye" of "almost female softness" in "its mingled gloom and flame" (lines 422-25). While later figures of speech masculinize Lorenzo, his enthusiasm remains feminized: "Lava floods of eloquence / Would come with fiery energy" from his lips (lines 436-38). In this passage, Landon nods to common associations of women with ecstatic feeling, but passion in Lorenzo is attractive, not dangerous. "Making women's heart his own" with honeyed voice and "haughty brow," Lorenzo represents an important double standard for enthusiasm (lines 443, 434). Whereas danger awaits the female enthusiast who falls in love, the male enthusiast "affirm[s] his own personality" and remains untainted by powerful feeling.[34]

Landon's extended attention to Lorenzo's enthusiasm also reveals the ways in which uncontrolled impulses in either party negatively affect women's artistic powers. Twice in three lines, Landon's speaker notes the effects of Lorenzo's "burning" gaze on her artistry, not on his:

> My hand kept wandering on my lute,
> In music, but unconsciously
> My pulses throbbed, my heart beat high,
> A flush of dizzy ecstasy
> Crimsoned my cheek; I felt warm tears
> Dimming my sight, yet was it sweet,

[33] See Margot K. Louis, "Enlarging the Heart: L. E. L.'s 'The Improvisatrice,' Hemans's 'Properzia Rossi,' and Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 26.1 (1998): 3.

[34] Baiesi, *Landon and Metrical Romance*, 87; cf. 94.

My wild heart's most bewildering beat[.] (lines 461-470)

As the Improvisatrice continues to play and feels bodily the raised spirits of her song, she notices her enthusiastic symptoms emerging from a new source. The "dizzy ecstasy" now arises from a beating heart, not a fired brain or lofty soul; moreover, in calling it "bewildering," Landon implies that Improvisatrice's throbbing heart may lead her astray.[35] "Consciou[s] . . . Of a new power within [her] waking," she begins to confound romantic feeling with poetic inspiration and expresses love in enthusiastic terms formerly reserved for her artistic endeavors: "my rapture," "the vision," a "song of passion, joy, and pride" (lines 471-72, 697-700). Later, her exclamatory apostrophe to the "Spirit of Love!" (as opposed to a spirit of poetry or even a lute) reinforces this shifting view of enthusiasm and its muses (line 705). Lorenzo appears as "graceful" and "magnificent" as the statue of Apollo next to Laura and Sappho, inspiring the Improvisatrice's rapturous tossing of "pencil and its hues aside" (lines 693, 449-50, 697-98). Her interest in art wanes as she sees feminized enthusiasm in Lorenzo and, more importantly, as she increasingly conceptualizes enthusiastic identity for herself through the "excess" of love (line 743).

If returning to the frame narrative dilutes the Improvisatrice's artistic devotion by mixing it with romantic love, then introducing a second dramatic monologue reaffirms and extends her sense of enthusiastic power by aligning her with female enthusiast avatars. In "The Hindoo Girl's Song," Landon uses costume, iconography, and live vocal performance to reconfigure her singer's relationship to instrument and audience at a masquerade "in COUNT LEON'S hall":

I went, garbed as a Hindoo girl;
Upon each arm an amulet,
And by my side a little lute
Of sandal-wood with gold beset. (lines 743-44, 747-50)

[35] "bewildering, adj." *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), last updated 2017, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/18470?result=2&rskey=mnGV1Y&.

The Improvisatrice puts on the Hindu woman's identity just as she dons the costume of a culture that fascinated Romantic-era Britons. Landon uses a series of objects to appropriate Hindu femininity, but she also relies on enthusiastic stereotypes that were applied with even greater vigor to Hindu women.[36] The Improvisatrice retains Sapphic markers but exoticizes them to fit her new persona and to invoke a more religiously inflected version of enthusiasm: laurels are replaced with amulets, objects of religious superstition and power; her lute is now made of sandalwood, a material associated with Hindu ritual worship,[37] and decorated with precious gold. Instead of singing as a Wesleyan convert or adorning her second vocalist with a Catholic rosary, Landon's only nod toward religious enthusiasm in this poem removes it as far as most British readers could imagine from her own belief structure. Whereas iconography and sensuality helped the Improvisatrice dramatize a painted Sappho's song, the symbols of female enthusiasm now appear on the Improvisatrice's body as she assumes the Hindu woman's identity. Landon thus extends and closes the distance between her speakers, simultaneously expanding and collapsing the poem's notions of female enthusiasm with each iteration.

Landon makes explicit the dramatization of lyric in this second monologue by casting it as a literal performance; the Improvisatrice dresses in costume, improvises a song, and enjoys the crowd's praise. Interestingly, though, the greatest applause erupts when she reveals her identity:

> And shall I own that I was proud
> To hear, amid the gazing crowd,

[36] For Landon's exotic heroines, see Knowles, *Sensibility and Female Poetic Tradition*, 122. See also Chapter 2's discussion of Sydney Owenson (Lady Morgan), *The Missionary: An Indian Tale* (1811), ed. Julia M. Wright (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2002), which exoticizes the Corinne myth by tracing the downfall of a Hindu prophetess named Luxima. Later, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "Romance of the Ganges" (1837) rehearses the unrequited love trope without framing the female speaker as artist; see Marjorie Stone and Beverly Taylor's headnote to this poem in *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Selected Poems*, ed. Marjorie Stone and Beverly Taylor (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2009), 57-58.

[37] See W. J. Johnson, "pūjā," in *A Dictionary of Hinduism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), last updated 2009, http://www.oxfordreference.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/view/10.1093/acref/ 9780198610250.001.0001/acref-9780198610250-e-1957.

A murmur of delight, when first
My mask and veil aside I threw? (lines 751-54)

The removal of her mask creates a state of half-disguise that materializes her transformation into the female enthusiast. Since she presumably retains the other pieces of her costume but reveals her face, the Improvisatrice compromises the distance provided by a full costume or, previously, by the totally separate portrait of Sappho. This tangible representation of a mediated dramatic speaker also prompts the audience (and Landon's readers) to remain aware of the performance. They knowingly worship a poetess who has fashioned herself as priestess, and who herself remains consciousness of a role that "creat[es] contrary feelings of exoticism and solidarity."[38] The Improvisatrice's questioning pride tentatively embraces the priestess identity for the benefit of her lover. Her "conscious cheek betray[s]" that she has noticed Lorenzo in the crowd, and praise becomes more "dear" as literary fame becomes a tribute to romantic love: "I was proud to be / Worshipped and flattered but for thee!" (lines 759-60). The second enthusiast monologue announces a new self-perception and, with it, new motives for pursuing fame.[39]

The Improvisatrice's stylistic progression from "Sappho's Song" to "The Hindoo Girl's Song" further demonstrates how her enthusiasm has become entangled with the gender dynamics of tragic romance. Repetitions of "I" assert Sappho's agency,[40] but the Hindoo Girl's passive statements compromise it. In the second monologue, the creative act becomes "the spell that is laid on my lover by me" (line 778). The spellbinder, now relegated to the line's final word, surrenders her subject position and—in the process—loses control of her enthusiasm to the love that now drives it. While singing in costume, the Improvisatrice appropriates more than the

[38] Simpson, *Literary Minstrelsy*, 142.

[39] See Baiesi, *Landon and Metrical Romance*, 87; and Linkin, "Romantic aesthetics," 175.

[40] See Prins, *Victorian Sappho*, 194.

Hindoo Girl's appearance. The song's maxim, "Love must never sleep in security," resonates so strongly with her that she plays an extra chord in her own person and voice. "But now," she notices, "the notes I waked were sad" (line 786). The notes are hers, and she presumably plays them unmasked, as herself. The Improvisatrice finds it harder to disengage from the Hindoo Girl's identity than from Sappho's because she has begun to partake more of the enthusiasm she performs. She recognizes artistic kinship with Sappho, but she is not Sappho, and she avoids her tragedy. In the second monologue, however, she temporarily "incarnates" the Hindoo Girl and her passive style.[41] Landon conflates the fictional poetess with the women she dramatizes, in effect reproducing the way readers often responded to Landon herself and subjecting her speaker to the tragic consequences of female enthusiasm that she wants to avoid.

After performing the songs of two other female enthusiasts, the Improvisatrice formalizes her own lyric moments as "Song." Rather than invoking a painted instrument or a costume prop, Landon's uses her own lute to "wake / The echoes of the midnight air / With words that love wrung from despair" (lines 1012, 1018-22). "Song" conceptualizes enthusiasm purely in terms of unrequited love and unavoidable separation, redirecting Sappho's "FAREWELL" to Lorenzo: "FAREWELL!—we shall not meet again!" (lines 141, 1023). The Improvisatrice no longer embraces her gifts, either as artistic powers or as means to attract Lorenzo. Left with few other options, she seeks to "hide . . . woman's love" through an exertion of "woman's pride":

> I must my beating heart restrain—
> Must veil my burning brow!
> Oh, I must coldly learn to hide
> One thought, all else above— (lines 1025-30)

Like Sappho, the Improvisatrice responds to faithless love by rejecting part of her womanhood, here the physical expressions of enthusiasm devoted to romance rather than to art. Landon uses a

[41] See Montwieler, "Laughing at Love," par. 6.

flurry of exclamation points to undermine her speaker's vows to control a broken heart and "veil" a feverish head, the latter of which invokes religious provisions for regulating enthusiasm through covering, or even cloistering, the ecstatic female body. Significantly, the dousing of love also affects the speaker's poetry: the "weight of wasting agony" flattens her verse, and "Song" loses the frame's energy and precision (line 1039). That she must now "[c]heck dreams" may refer to her artistic ambitions as well as her romantic fancies (line 1031). She has sung of sadness before, but now that dramatic monologue has collapsed back into lyric, she finds no consolation in—and no escape from—the subject of her singing. "It must be mine to bear," she resolves (line 1040), implying that, as Serena Baiesi contends, Landon's speaker "loses something of her personality" in each performance.[42] Inspiring "voices" speak on, but her own enthusiasm fades into "echoes of the broken heart" (lines 1074, 1069). Eventually, only the echoes remain.

Landon's *Improvisatrice* uses these echoes to meditate on the conundrum of Romantic-era female enthusiasm. With each new song, the speaker imaginatively embodies an enthusiast's experiences and then rearticulates them in her own voice. This formal experiment succeeds in sketching at once the dominant tropes of female enthusiasm and its range of individualities; moreover, Landon's work in developing these poems helps solidify the conventions that would establish the monologue in the Victorian age. But these conventions were still in flux, and Landon's inclusion of other, more established genres in *The Improvisatrice* suggests that she was uncertain about how to present these nested, overlapping, character-driven monologues, or even that she was unsure how they would be received. In addition to the two performances discussed above, Landon includes four intervening romances that imagine exoticized relationships

[42] Baiesi, *Landon and Metrical Romance*, 87.

destroyed by "betrayals in love."[43] These harken back to the narrative model used by Mary Shelley, where third-person accounts of multiple female enthusiasts demonstrate the possibilities (and futilities) of that position for inspired women. They also provide an important contrast that heightens the performative effect of Landon's layered dramatic monologues. Whereas the Improvisatrice sings as Sappho and the Hindoo Girl, she sings about these other tragic couples, and their presence within the gallery of Landon's entire poem pushes readers to see that formal difference. Ultimately, the final romance, "Leades and Cydippe," helps transition from the Improvisatrice's tragic songs to her demise. Cydippe is abandoned by her "faithless" lover, who returns to find her "[w]asted . . . silently away" by lovesickness (lines 1138, 1162-63). Her death foreshadows the Improvisatrice's own,[44] which, by the time the frame closes, she has imagined over and again through narratives and role-playing. The Improvisatrice has sung of ill-fated love and the women who fall into it. At last, she becomes the subject of her own tragic art.

Landon's speaker imagines, admires, tries on, and finally embodies the identity of female enthusiast in what becomes a meta-commentary on the way writers like Landon and Shelley use historical fiction or dramatic monologue to work out the problems facing women of genius in the 1820s and 1830s. Glennis Byron identifies this "merging" of speaker and poet as a hallmark feature of women's dramatic monologues in the nineteenth century,[45] but I find that Landon's *Improvisatrice* resists this model even as she engages it directly. Landon's vacillations between the lyric and the dramatic capture, paradoxically, both a merging and a fragmentation of subjectivity as the Improvisatrice exchanges artistic ambition for romantic desire. Her identification with Sappho and the Hindoo Girl lies precisely in their relinquishment of poetic

[43] Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets*, 59.

[44] See Leighton, *Victorian Woman Poets*, 59.

[45] Byron, "Rethinking the Dramatic Monologue," 90.

agency. Later in the poem, after being abandoned by Lorenzo, the speaker despairs of her "broken heart" and resigns her ambitions of a literary legacy to a hope of posthumous recognition by her unfaithful lover. She fashions a memorial to Sappho, but, as Yopi Prins notes, the Improvisatrice's dying words borrow from her poetic idol: "LORENZO! be this kiss a spell! / My first! — my last! FAREWELL! — FAREWELL! (lines 1529-30).[46] Her dying song becomes her final poem, and her death enshrines her in a gallery of dead poetesses. Landon completes the poem's frame by marbleizing her speaker as a tragic female enthusiast who has lost herself in that identity by making it subservient to love.

Critics have puzzled over *The Improvisatrice*'s strange ending, which adds a final frame piece that has no precedent in the poem,[47] but I read this formal anomaly as one more distancing mechanism by Landon. Her protagonist-speaker has just given a dramatic farewell that would logically end the poem when a new, unnamed speaker appears to describe the doleful master of "a lone and stately hall" in Italy (line 1531). The man "muse[s] his weary life away" in a gallery, and the poem ends with the new speaker's discovery of the "loveliest" painting in the room (lines 1542-43, 1546,1534). With "[d]ark flashing eyes," a rosy blush, and "[a] cloud of raven hair" encircled by a "laurel braid," the painting's subject bears all the markers of female enthusiasm, as well as traits that link her directly to Sappho (lines 1557-62). The "harp" on which she leans and the "silvery words" the viewer imagines her speaking both proclaim her poetic identity (lines 1563, 1566). Most strikingly, though, the portrait's subject is:

> All soul, all passion, and all fire;
> A priestess of Apollo's, when
> The morning beams fall on her lyre;
> A Sappho. (lines 1568-71)

[46] Prins, *Victorian Sappho*, 194.

[47] See, for example, Linkin, "Romantic aesthetics," 177-79.

Not *the* Sappho, but "*A* Sappho" (line 1571, emphasis mine). The visitor assigns this moniker based on perceived enthusiastic characteristics,[48] making "Sappho" shorthand for the soulful, passionate, fiery woman poet. Here, as throughout *The Improvisatrice*, Landon represents her protagonist advancing from imitation to embodiment of Sapphic enthusiasm. Significantly, this poetic image predates the Improvisatrice's love affair: she is "A Sappho, or ere love had turned / The heart to stone where once it burned" (lines 1571-72). In these lines, the visitor uses Sapphic myth to surmise the fate of the painted poetess. This typecasting assumes a cooling of enthusiastic power in life and a tragic end appropriate to Landon's fictional speaker, who has throughout configured her own enthusiasm via other women's art, love, and tragedy.

Landon concludes by grimly reinforcing enthusiasm's consequences for Romantic-era women who follow in the footsteps of Corinne, Sappho, or the Hindoo Girl. The woman poet's fate crystalizes in the brooding gentleman's memorial: "by the picture's side was placed / A funeral urn, on which was traced / The heart's recorded wretchedness" (lines 1573-75).[49] If we take the heart to be the Improvisatrice's, then the urn's record may be a selection of her verse. She could have commissioned it as part of her memorial efforts, or Lorenzo could have had it engraved later. In either case, it is interesting to consider which poem could have been chosen: was it "Sappho's Song," "The Hindoo Girl's Song," or the Improvisatrice's own lyric? Landon's ambiguity highlights the interchangeability of these monologues. Because the Improvisatrice has used them to imitate and then become the female enthusiast, her individual story and even her name become lost in a tragic type. Above the urn and painting, a graven "tribute of sad words" reinforces this anonymity. It reads, "'LORENZO TO HIS MINSTREL LOVE,'" a title applicable to any of the women Landon's Improvisatrice has idolized (line 1578). As Angela Leighton points out,

[48] See Simpson, *Literary Minstrelsy*, 62; and Prins, *Victorian Sappho*, 197.

[49] See Esterhammer, *Romanticism and Improvisation*, 96-97.

the elegiac placard signifies Lorenzo's long-overdue recognition of his lover's minstrelsy, but it fails to give her name, or to acknowledge her apart from her role as "his inspired sibyl or Sappho."[50] His tribute reinforces the erasure the Improvisatrice's poem has enacted. Minstrel no more, she is now a "minstrel love," transformed for and possessed by a man who fails to return her love until it is too late. The Improvisatrice's painting does not stand alone, does not bear her name, and does not exist as a solitary art object apart from her remains as placed and labeled by her guilt-ridden lover. These objects' juxtaposition symbolizes the poetess's "human and poetical character," to borrow Christopher North's phrase in the epigraph from *Blackwood's*. As Landon's monologues show, this union proves unsustainable for the female enthusiast, who in this case fashions herself as object and gains praise for her art only at the cost of her life.[51]

The Improvisatrice uses art to imagine and explore female enthusiasm, at first from a safe distance but then, increasingly, from within it. She first paints a tragic Sappho relinquishing her instrument, then exoticizes the enthusiast's tragedy by assuming the identity of the Hindoo Girl, and finally memorializes her own Sapphic martyrdom in art after she and Lorenzo part. Her investment in the enthusiast narrative begins with imitation born of admiration but becomes more unavoidable—and more dangerous—until she also appears as a cautionary tale on a gallery wall. Her audience, the overhearers of dramatic monologue and lyric, are left to wonder: Can the poetess access enthusiasm without consigning herself to this tragic fate? And if not, is it worth it? Predictably, Landon answers with ambiguity. Her distance from the Improvisatrice implies wariness of the enthusiast identity, but Landon's many successful performances of that identity in this poem reveal her knowledge of and fascination with it. Landon keeps just clear of the

[50] Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets*, 61; see also Montwieler, "Laughing at Love," par. 31.

[51] For additional comments on the woman as art object in this final frame, see Baiesi, *Landon and Metrical Romance*, 88; Louis, "Enlarging the Heart," 6, 8; and Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets*, 61. For Landon's epitaph, which was erected by her husband and used her married name, see Blanchard, *Life and Literary Remains*, I, 256.

female enthusiast while formulating a poetic strategy to save her. Dramatizing lyric with a fictional speaker and a particularized setting removes the poetess from the poem to a safer subject position. Landon exploits this distance to demonstrate what would happen without it: the Improvisatrice does not survive the conflation of lyric and dramatic monologue. Aware of this danger, Landon uses the latter form to safeguard herself against her speaker's fate.

II. A Singular Voice: Landon's Later Monologues

Over the next fifteen years, Landon continued to use the dramatic monologue form to interrogate female enthusiasm while sidestepping its opprobrium. The strategy did not entirely succeed in preserving Landon's reputation, but it did help her refine her conception of the female enthusiast and her skill as a monologist. *The Improvisatrice* had achieved impressive—if little hoped-for[52]—success in the 1820s, making the dramatic monologue a hallmark of Landon's career and setting the tone for her meditations on the female enthusiast in later poems. In 1824, the reading public was still obsessed with uncovering details of her personal and professional life, and they were primed for a poem like *The Improvisatrice*. Her caution in writing female enthusiasts may have arisen, at least in part, from others' readings of her work as thinly veiled autobiography. The poem's multiplication of female enthusiast speakers appears to have stoked that tendency[53]; however, its monologues encouraged Landon's audience to map her poem the poem's dramatic speakers not merely as lovelorn women, but as avatars of their own

[52] In an 1837 letter to S. C. Hall, Landon recalls, "The 'Improvisatrice' met with the usual difficulties attendant on a first attempt. It was refused by every publisher in London . . . . and for months it remained unpublished" (*Letters by Letitia Elizabeth Landon*, ed. F. J. Sypher [Ann Arbor: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 2001], 18; hereafter *Letters*).

[53] See Watt, *Poisoned Lives*, 34; Linkin, "Romantic Aesthetics," 172-73; Lootens, "Receiving the Legend," 248-49; and Pascoe, *Romantic Theatricality*, 240.

improvisatrice, the "English Sappho."[54] Sypher notes a widespread perception of Landon as "a gifted 'improvisatrice' who could invent poetic material from virtually any subject, and could compose with ease and rapidity."[55] Sarah Sheppard had called Landon's public readings "communion with a high priestess of poetry."[56] Most of Landon's contemporaries seem to have been impressed with her "extempore flow," but others viewed her "hectic, hysterical high spirits" as excessively melancholy.[57] Many used Landon's tacit association with Sappho to malign her character.[58] Generally, though, Landon's popularity led even the most critical of reviewers to

[54] Benjamin Disraeli called Landon "Sappho" in a letter of 1832, and many eulogists and biographers invoke *The Improvisatrice*, often quoting passages from the poem to describe Landon's character and work. See Benjamin Disraeli, *Lord Beaconsfield's Correspondence with His Sister, 1832-1852* (London: John Murray, 1886), 6, 1-2; qtd. in Sypher, *Biography*, 122. Among Landon eulogies, see Charles Swain's poem in *The Friendship's Offering* for 1840, which explicitly links Landon with Sappho before calling her "The IMPROVISATRICE of our land" (qtd. in William Bates, after William Maginn, "Letitia Elizabeth Landon," in *The Maclise Portrait-Gallery of "Illustrious Literary Characters," with memoirs biographical, critical, bibliographical & anecdotal, illustrative of the literature of the former half of the present century* [London: Chatto and Windus, 1883], 205). Among memoirs that make similar linkages, prominent examples include Sheppard, *Genius and Writings*, 77n, qtd. above; William Howitt, "L. E. L.," in *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap-Book* (London: Fisher, Son, & Co., 1840), 5-8; Blanchard, *Life and Literary Remains*, I, 40-41; and William Howitt, "L. E. L.," in *Homes and Haunts of the Most Eminent British Poets*, 2 vols. (London: R. Bentley, 1847), II, 125-44. See also Prins, *Victorian Sappho*, 197-99.

[55] Sypher, *Biography*, 45, cf. 98. Chapter 4 of Sypher's *Biography* is titled "The English Improvisatrice." Landon seems to have viewed herself in a similar light, boasting to Alaric Watts that she had composed *The Improvisatrice* in just five weeks and then left it untouched until completing surface-level revisions a year later. See Letitia Elizabeth Landon to Alaric Alexander Watts, August 1824 (*Letters*, 18). In 1837, Landon remarked to S. C. Hall that she "wr[o]te poetry with far more ease . . . and with far greater rapidity" than she wrote prose, and never so much as hesitated for a word when composing verse (*Letters*, 168).

[56] Sheppard, *Genius and Writings*, 77n; cf. 35.

[57] Edward Robert Bulwer Lytton, *The Life, Letters and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton*, by his son, 2 vols. (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, & Co., 1883), II, 48, 134, qtd. in Sypher, *Biography*, 11; and Henry Fothergill Chorley, *Autobiography, Memoir, & Letters*, comp. Henry G. Hewlett, 2 vols. (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1873), I, 252, qtd. in Sypher, *Biography*, 30. See also Baiesi, *Landon and Metrical Romance*, 63-64, 78.

[58] A compromising article, "Sapphics and Erotics," appeared in *The Sunday Times* for March 5, 1826, and implied an appropriate relationship between Landon and William Jerdan. In the absence of names, the article expects readers to recognize Landon as "a well-known English Sappho" (qtd. in Sypher, *Biography*, 81-82). See also Cynthia Lawford, "'Though shalt bid thy fair hands rove': L. E. L.'s Wooing of Sex, Pain, Death and the Editor," *Romanticism on the Net* 29-30, last updated February, May 2003, http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/007718ar; Lawford discusses "Sapphics and Erotics" in par. 35. *The Improvisatrice* seems to have become a particular source for these rumors by the time this article appeared. In a letter of June 1826, Landon complains to Katherine Thomson that, while *The Improvisatrice* had initially been received as unexceptionable, it was lately criticized as "immoral and improper" (*Letters*, 28). See also Susan Matoff, "William Jerdan and *The Literary Gazette*," *The Wordsworth Circle* 46.3 (2015): 191.

"fin[d] in her youth . . . an excuse for her enthusiasm."[59] It appears that the "Sappho" label stuck. For the rest of her life, even as she broached new subjects and genres, Landon's legacy had been sealed by her breakout poem of 1824. She was what she wrote: an improvising enthusiast.

These public perceptions of Landon's style aligned her with the female enthusiast type, but also with the nascent genre of dramatic monologue that she had used to explore it. "Her style of reading was peculiar," recalls Sheppard, "a kind of recitative,—more poetical than musical, derived rather from the soul than from the ear; but giving the fullest effect to every variation of thought, feeling and character."[60] For memoirist Emma Roberts, Landon's ability to effect intense emotion depended on her imaginative relationship to character: "L. E. L. identified herself with the beings of her fancy," and with their trials in love, "lamenting, frequently in the first person, over miseries which she had never felt."[61] Roberts's comment provides strong evidence for Landon's notoriety as an early practitioner of the still-evolving genre of dramatic monologue. Landon identified with experiences outside her own, using the first person to exude sincerity while avoiding the poet-speaker correlation of lyric. Like her ill-fated protagonist, "[s]he became for the time a literal improvisatrice" by entering into characters of her own creation to explore a situation that became increasingly (and more dangerously) familiar.[62]

In the wake of this intensified biographical reception, Landon changed her approach to her female enthusiast monologues. Most of Landon's subsequent dramatic poems lack the mediation and narrative contextualization of those featured in *The Improvisatrice*. This

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[59] Sypher, *Biography*, 63. Sypher summarizes comments by William Maginn in his August 1824 review for *Blackwood's Magazine*. See also Mary Howitt's epistolary comment that Landon was "but a girl of twenty, a genius, and therefore she must be excused" (*Mary Howitt: An Autobiography*, ed. Margaret Howitt, 2 vols. [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1889], I, 187-88, qtd. in Sypher, *Biography*, 64).

[60] Sheppard, *Genius and Writings*, 77n.

[61] Roberts, "Memoir," 10.

[62] Sheppard, *Genius and Writings*, 77n.

simplification likely satisfied friends and readers who were frustrated by *The Improvisatrice*'s repetitive structure. For example, Laman Blanchard identifies in "the melodious confusion of the 'Improvisatrice'" one of Landon's only poetic sins: "employing two ideas, or three, where one was enough."[63] Whether or not Blanchard confided this critique to Landon, she did move away from a multiplying form toward the Victorian model of single-voiced monologues that rely on historical or mythological types to construct character.[64] I see two possible reasons for this shift in Landon's approach: 1) shorter, stand-alone monologues better fit her late-career publishing model, and 2) the growing pervasiveness of her *improvisatrice* mythology made further contextualization unnecessary. My first theory arises from Landon's increased gift-book contribution in the late 1820s and novel writing in the early 1830s. Reviewers had shown more interest in "the poems within the poem" than in *The Improvisatrice*'s complex frame,[65] which may partly explain why "Erinna" appeared without such narrative context in *The Golden Violet* (1826). Afterward, Landon composed several monologues as poetic accompaniments to engravings in literary annuals, and she may have saved lengthier romance plots for the novels she composed in the 1830s.[66] As for the second theory, Landon's reputation could have driven a shift in form. Having established herself as a writer of female enthusiast monologues, she no longer needed *The Improvisatrice*'s gallery to hold them. Landon's career effectively became that gallery, and the monologues she published after 1824 came to hang on that gallery wall in the minds of her readers and reviewers.

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[63] Blanchard, *Life and Literary Remains*, I, 42; cf. I, 275.

[64] See Grant, "A Glance at the Life and Writings of L. E. L.," 209.

[65] Sypher, *Biography*, 65.

[66] Charles E. Robinson traces a similar trend toward shorter fictional pieces in Mary Shelley's gift book publishing after her husband's death; see his introduction to Mary Shelley, *Collected Tales and Stories*, ed. Charles E. Robinson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), xi-xiv.

This section analyzes two such gallery hangings—"Erinna" (1826) and "The Prophetess" (1838)—to demonstrate Landon's engagements with the Romantic female enthusiast tradition through her innovations on the dramatic monologue. Both poems, like *The Improvisatrice*, speak through the personae of inspired women whose successes lead to ambivalence, even despair, about their status as female enthusiasts. Their thematic likenesses show enthusiasm's importance in Landon's *oeuvre*, but their formal differences show how Landon's development of dramatic monologues inflects that theme. Published just two years after *The Improvisatrice*, "Erinna" loses the narrative frame and multiplied voices, but it does use a similar "Introductory Notice" to explaining the speaker's identity. "Erinna"'s length also sets it apart: though only one-fifth of *The Improvisatrice*'s total length, its 371 lines make it much longer than any of the interpolated songs from other female enthusiasts. Even shorter is Landon's later monologue, "The Prophetess," which appeared without preface in *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap-Book* for 1838 and then in *The Zenana and Minor Poems of L. E. L.* (1839). At only 69 lines, it has more in common with the monologues of Tennyson and Browning than it does with Landon's prior experiments; however, apostrophic quality resurrects the genre's lyric beginnings as the Prophetess seems more like an archetypal speaker than a particular character. Landon's invocation of the "prophetess" type also expands her definition of female enthusiasm to include a religious model without the stereotypes and constraints of sectarian representation. Over the twelve years between "Erinna" and "The Prophetess," Landon's development as a monologist and her evolution as a thinker about female enthusiasm go hand in hand. By tracing Landon's intertwining of enthusiastic form and content in these poems, we can better grasp the possibilities she imagined for women's mantic verse.

According to nineteenth-century critics, modern scholars, and Landon herself, "Erinna" imagines anew the possibilities and consequences for women who seek fame as poetesses. And while Landon painstakingly argued otherwise, the first two groups attribute part of "Erinna"'s appeal to its revelations of the poet's own feelings about her abilities and career. *Gazette* editor William Jerdan, who was known for extravagant puffs of Landon's work, suggests that "Erinna" is "perhaps the highest effort of L. E. L.'s genius," which is at once "so widely diversified and so splendidly embodied."[67] Jerdan could also have cited *The Improvisatrice*, with its multiple voices and acute embodiment of strong feeling; however, modern critics tend to view "Erinna" as the more interesting poem because it embodies more closely Landon's own experience and poetics.[68] Landon does appear to have felt the personal significance of this later monologue for her theory of female enthusiasm, perhaps in her awareness that it would be read biographically despite its focus on the career of an eighteen-year-old Greek poetess. While composing "Erinna" in October 1826, Landon was "anxious" about the poem's reception, but she expresses confidence in her idea, if not in its execution: "if I can write up to the idea I have formed, it must be a striking poem" (*Letters*, 35, 36). Landon's excitement stems from her idea's originality and nuance:

> Other poets have painted a very sufficient quantity of poetical miseries; but my aim is not to draw neglected genius, or 'mourn a laurel planted on the tomb'—but to trace the progress of a mind highly-gifted, well-rewarded, but finding the fame it won a sting and a sorrow, and finally sinking beneath the shadow of success. (*Letters*, 35-36)[69]

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[67] William Jerdan, Review of *The Golden Violet*, in *The Literary Gazette* 517 (December 16, 1826): 785-87; qtd. in Sypher, *Biography*, 99.

[68] For "Erinna" as "Landon's poetic autobiography, see Sypher, *Biography*, 97; and Riess, "The Dawn of Post-Romanticism," 825.

[69] Qtd. in Blanchard, *Letters and Literary Remains*, I, 66. Landon repeats two key metaphors in her letter to Emma Roberts: she again figures her portrayal of Erinna as a drawing, and the success of fame as a shadow (*Letters*, 36).

Perhaps in a self-directed joke, Landon recognizes the glut of poems on "poetical miseries"; however, her new poem aims modifies the cause rather than the fate of the miserable poetess. Instead of starving from neglect, Erinna will find more fame than she wants.

Landon's "Introductory Notice" to "Erinna" announces two important, interrelated characteristics: the poem portrays yet another female enthusiast with close links to Landon's own career, and it does so through the form of dramatic monologue. A poem like this "has long floated on [Landon's] imagination," her "aim . . . to draw the portrait and trace the changes of a highly poetical mind" later identified as that of a young Greek poetess about whom "very little is known."[70] Erinna's "local habitation and . . . name" help make her a believable dramatic speaker, but her backstory lacks the fullness of Sapphic mythology, freeing Landon from the constraints of its ubiquity and pushing her toward the more minimalist form of the Victorian dramatic monologue. When Landon explains that "Erinna was a poetess from her cradle" who only lived to eighteen, present-day readers may expect this information to suffice ("Introductory Notice," 87). After all, the speakers of "Dramatic Lyric" in Browning's *Bells and Pomegranates* (1842) receive no introduction whatsoever, even when unfamiliar to readers. Landon supplies more characterization but uses unfamiliarity to her advantage, treating Erinna as a repository for universal thoughts on artistry and fame; moreover, as Glennis Stephenson notes, Landon "draws the portrait" of Erinna as "an ideal not a historical picture."[71] Erinna's likeness could adorn the Improvisatrice's gallery wall next to the portrait of Sappho, and her monologue should be read in the same vein. The poem treats "feelings," not "incidents" (87), suggesting that Landon will

[70] Letitia Elizabeth Landon, "Introductory Notice" to "Erinna," in *Letitia Elizabeth Landon: Selected Writings*, ed. Jerome McGann and Daniel Riess (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 1997), 87; hereafter cited parenthetically.

[71] Stephenson reads the "Introductory Notice" differently, arguing that Landon ignores Erinna's historicity in order to make her into a type that brings her closer to the "L. E. L." identity rather than creating distance ("The Construction of L. E. L.," 6).

again privilege the lyric characteristics of the dramatic monologue while, at the same time, relying on character and setting to distance herself from those sentiments.

Joining the "Introductory Notice" is a 23-line epigraph, apparently written by Landon, which further situates Erinna as a female enthusiast—with an adorned brow, floating hair, and a "kindled eye"[72]—but also holds these characteristics in tension with feminine gentleness and restraint (88). "The mouth and the brow are contrasts," Landon writes, setting up a list of foiled traits. The brow represents "the melancholy pride of thought / Conscious of power," as well as a painful sense of how that power weakens when housed in a woman's body. But "the sweet mouth," which represents femininity, "had nothing of all this" (88). In Landon's abbreviated blazon, the brow holds a much less comfortable position than does the rose-kissed mouth. The contrast becomes more pointed as the epigraph concludes: "The one spoke genius, in its high revealing; / The other smiled a woman's gentle feeling" (88). Oddly, the brow speaks, and the mouth smiles. Landon's metaphor may begin to crack in these lines, but, extricated from a strict metonymic reading, it helps explain Landon's view of female enthusiasm The lofty brow reveals "[t]he glorious lightning of the kindled eye, / Raised, as it communed with its native sky," while the "lovely face" serves as "the spirit's fitting shrine," the physical casement of enthusiasm (88). Here, as in later essays, Landon pits womanhood's physical and social limitations against her lofty poetical mind: "The one almost, the other quite divine" (88). The "delicate and feminine" mouth smiles contentedly in the lower half of the face while the brow and eye gaze upward, seeking communion with the divinity that allows them to speak where the mouth cannot.

[72] See, for instance, Beatrice and Euthanasia's headwear in *Valperga*, and the "flashing eyes and floating hair" of the poet-prophet in Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" (*Valperga* 129, 78; "Kubla Khan," line 50; and Chapter 2).

Erinna often describes herself as a divided female / enthusiast in these terms; however, in other moments she reconciles the two by privileging the enthusiast half.[73] For instance, in the "olive grove" scene of Erinna's poetic awakening, she "bathed [her] fever'd brow in the cold stream" (line 7). Landon's poem exemplifies that intersection of Greater Romantic Lyric and Victorian dramatic monologue where the particularized setting drives an extended reflection. The grove prompts a memory of early failures and quenches Erinna's enthusiasm: she wishes she "could wash away the fire / From which that moment kindled in my heart" (lines 8-9). She attributes this fire to her brow, her heart, and finally to her brain, which she describes as "drunk and mad with its first draught of fame" (line 15). Initially, at least, Erinna defies the expectations set by Landon's epigraph and proudly compares herself to "a young goddess" who relishes her immortality, power, and laurel crown (lines 11, 14, 6, 30). Fame has strengthened—not diminished—the "sweet and breathing bond / Between me and my kind" (lines 43-44). Lastly, Erinna has no love interest, which allows her to conceptualize her poetic identity apart from the gendered expectations that trap Landon's earlier Improvisatrice. Temporarily freed from the choice between a smiling mouth and a speaking brow, Landon's Erinna achieves a strikingly unified view of self, and of the female enthusiast.[74]

The absence of a courtship motif also frees Landon to explore female enthusiasm through "Erinna"'s dramatized lyric tropes without *The Improvisatrice*'s layered narrative. The first such trope is apostrophe, in terms of which "Erinna" falls nearer to the lyric mode of "Sappho's Song" than to the dramatic performance of "The Hindoo Girl's Song." Erinna's first apostrophe briefly and subtly establishes Erinna's poetic credentials: "Olympus, I received thy laurel crown" (line 30). The second undermines them. After nearly three hundred lines without a clear auditor,

[73] See Roberts, "Memoir," 9.

[74] For a different view, see Esterhammer, *Romanticism and Improvisation*, 99.

Erinna addresses her heart, her lyre, a star, and her lute in quick succession to emphasize the dissolution of her enthusiast identity. "O heart of mine!" she exclaims, "my once sweet paradise / Of love and hope! how changed thou art to me!" (lines 305-6). Fame has alienated Erinna from her heart, which she blames for "los[ing] / Interest in the once idols of [its] being" (lines 307-8).[75] A similar sense of betrayal pervades her address to the lyre: "Farewell, my lyre! thou has not been to me / All I once hoped" (lines 328-29). Rather than continuing to foster sympathy and belonging, the lyre has destroyed Erinna's "companionship," and her exclamatory "Farewell!" rings a painful echo of two key moments in Landon's *Improvisatrice*: the opening line of Sappho's song and the Improvisatrice's final line (line 331; *Improvisatrice*, 141, 1530). Erinna's last two apostrophes— "Thou lovely and lone star" and "O lute of mine," respectively—seem less bitter than mournful, but they join the others in foregrounding Erinna's status as dramatic speaker, as well as the performative genre in which Landon imagines her speech.

Readers can lose sight of Landon's dramatic distancing mechanism as "Erinna" assumes a more lyric form with a sustained reflection on enthusiasm and her changing relationship to it. After recalling the olive grove's significance for her early brush with enthusiasm, Erinna reflects:

> And twice new birth of violets have sprung,
> Since they were my first pillow, since I sought
> In the deep silence of the olive grove
> The dreamy happiness which solitude
> Brings to the soul o'erfill'd with its delight:
> For I was like some young and sudden heir
> Of a rich palace heap'd with gems and gold,
> Whose pleasure doubles as he sums his wealth
> And forms a thousand plans of festival;
> Such were my myriad visions of delight. (lines 31-40)

[75] See Stephenson, "The Construction of L. E. L.," 7.

Like the "five summers, with the length / Of five long winters" in William Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey,"[76] the two springs of new violets in Landon's poem denote more than the passage of time. They provide a nostalgic view of Erinna's first visit to the grove and preface the speaker's reflections on childhood. Instead of losing access to the divine as she ages,[77] Erinna approaches divinity through inherited, sympathetic enthusiasm. But like the Wordsworthian child, she evinces "immortality" through poetry and learns what "solitude" can be to a poet (line 45, 71). Erinna's enthusiastic education mirrors the wakening of her lyre, which may explain her later sense of betrayal at its abandonment. As her "own heart's true interpreter," the lyre "mingle[s]" her "feelings" with those of her listeners, her fellow poets, and the natural world (lines 44, 48, 52).[78] As a symbol of her enthusiast status, it collects memories of inspiration gained and lost.

Erinna's changing relationship to the lyre—as interpreter, as tool, and as symbol—also helps readers chart her loss of agency and her self-identification as an enthusiast. Not yet a third of the way through her monologue, Erinna begins to describe how inheritance leads to dedication, which ultimately results in her soul being totally subsumed:

> I gave my soul entire unto the gift
> I deem'd mine own, direct from heaven; it was
> The hope, the bliss, the energy of life;
> I had no hope that dwelt not with my lyre,
> No bliss whose being grew not from my lyre,
> No energy undevoted to my lyre.
> It was my other self, that had a power;
> Mine, but o'er which I had not a control. (lines 81-88)

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[76] William Wordsworth, "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a tour, July 13, 1798," in *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, ed. James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), lines 1-2.

[77] See Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," in *Poems in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800-1807*, ed. Jared Curtis (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), lines 56-67.

[78] See Esterhammer, *Romanticism and Improvisation*, 100.

This passage enacts a transition from Erinna's agency to receptivity.[79] Landon's first two lines position her speaker as the subject of two active verbs: "gave" and "deem'd," and the ambiguity of "soul entire" suggests double control and double devotion on Erinna's part: she chooses to give all of her soul, and she chooses to give it fully. After that point, the lines slowly drain away Erinna's control, and Erinna recognizes that she can receive "No bliss" and expend "No energy" except as related to her gift. Finally, Landon seals Erinna's relinquishing of agency with more ambiguity: "It was my other self, that had a power; / Mine, but o'er which I had not a control" (lines 87-88). This sentence captures the paradox of Romantic enthusiasm and serves as the thesis for Erinna's (and Landon's) relationship to the concept in this poem. Erinna's power is not taken from her; instead, she abdicates in favor of her "other self." Tension between the two lines reveals her struggle with that transfer: passive construction compounds Erinna's uneasy vacating of agency in line 87, but she reasserts herself in the emphatic "Mine" that begins line 88. This reassertion lasts only for a word, though, as Erinna proves unable to control her enthusiasm. In devoting herself to this gift, she has lost agency over it and its uses. Then, "song came gushing, like the natural tears" and the emotion that prompts them (line 93)— not by a conscious or controlled act of the poetess, but through her as an enthusiastic conduit of inspiration.

Erinna's enthusiasm shows in widely recognized tropes, words, and formal features that emphasize a speaker negotiating a feminine gift that increases her power but compromises her agency. There is plenty of rapture (line 188), soul stirring (line 126), pulse throbbing (lines 144, 156), and communion with the divine (lines 192-94, 250) in this monologue. But its clearest statement of female enthusiast poetics occurs in Erinna's critical reflection on how her gift has changed her composition. In the olive grove she viewed enthusiasm as an unequivocal blessing, but after learning that negative "thought[s] could be attach'd to song," she yearns for simpler

[79] For a different view, see Esterhammer, *Romanticism and Improvisation*, 100.

times (lines 105-7). Erinna's nostalgia echoes that of many Romantic poets in what Lokke calls "the meditation on enthusiasm at the heart of her poem."[80] Erinna's youthful heart "[m]ingled with its pleasures, fill'd / With rich enthusiasm, which once flung / Its purple colouring o'er all things of earth" (lines 108-110). Enthusiasm serves as both a subject of and an influence on Erinna's memory. She figures enthusiasm as a dye or filter tincturing everything in sight of her youthful heart, and saving her from the sharpness, even fatalness, of the "utmost power of thought" (line 112). Read in conjunction with Landon's epigraph, these lines imply a feminine enthusiasm of the heart, as opposed to thought imagined as violence. Enthusiasm is a tamer of power, not the power itself. The gendering of enthusiasm in Erinna's memory intensifies with her next metaphor: "Like woman's soothing influence o'er man, / Enthusiasm is upon the mind" (lines 113-14). The gendering seems abrupt, especially given that Landon avoids a romance plot in this poem. Lokke suggests that formulating "enthusiasm as an explicitly female/feminine poetic power" contradicts negative associations of enthusiasm with femininity and hypersexuality.[81] Erinna—an inspired poetess bearing physicalized markers of strong feeling—eventually comes to view enthusiasm as a feminine sensibility that welcomes poetic control, Furthermore, since enthusiasm "[s]often[s] and beautif[ies]" thoughts that are "[t]oo harsh and too sullen" (115-16), it exerts a positive force on poetry, too. By feminizing enthusiasm, Landon thus implies not only that female enthusiasm can be safe, but also that it can improve overly masculine poetry.

This unexpected amelioration of female enthusiasm is strengthened by Landon's use of other positive feminocentric metaphors in "Erinna." Landon's speaker figures womanhood in diverse, powerful ways, even after she begins to lament its consequences. Recall, for instance,

[80] Lokke, "British Legacies of *Corinne*," 179.

[81] Lokke, "British Legacies of *Corinne*," 179-80.

Erinna's aspirational comparison of herself to a goddess in the olive grove (line 11). A similar metaphor appears much later in the poem where Erinna compares the moon to "a veiled priestess from the east," which rises as Erinna feels the "transport" of her lute (lines 266, 269). The moon appears again near poem's end, when Erinna imagines her songs being "[r]ead by the dark-eyed maiden in an hour / Of moonlight, till her cheek shone with its tears" (lines 341-42). In both cases, feminine imagery misleadingly beautifies the composition or reception of Erinna's poetry. Though transported with the hymnal wind and the priestly moon, Erinna's ambitions prove mere "idols" (line 261). The "dark-eyed maiden" cries over "the mournful history / Of woman's tenderness and woman's tears" (lines 349-50). Erinna's enthusiasm cannot survive a career. Its feminizing force had tinctured her every youthful line with the "purple colouring" of woman's strong feeling (line 110),[82] but later her dreams' "colouring is from reality" (line 327). Erinna may steer clear of a romance plot, but her songs, like the Improvisatrice's, depict a world in which womanhood cannot escape love's sting. Erinna has "touch'd but the spirit's gentlest chords"—those "fittest for [her] maiden hand"—and remains confident that her "immortality" comes from those songs' "truth," but she no longer wishes to sing them (lines 351-53).[83] With her enthusiasm weakened, she cannot look beyond the "stern ambition," "worldly cares," and "petty vanities / That mar her nature's beauty" (lines 361-63). Lokke reads this turn as proof that enthusiasm transcends "the commercial and the commodified," but even if it does, Erinna no longer wields that "purifying power" in any way that matters.[84] The poem ends in sorrow and,

[82] Blanchard makes a similar claim of Landon herself: "the tastes she displayed were those of the poetry and the romance that coloured all her visions, waking or asleep" (*Life and Literary Remains*, I, 25).

[83] Ianetta reads these lines as representative of the woman rhetor's claim to "a public rhetorical space" and to a version of the "rhetorical sublime" ("'To Elevate I Must First Soften,'" 416). Riess reads the passage as Landon's own admission of blame and plea for readerly sympathy ("The Dawn of Post-Romanticism," 823).

[84] Lokke, "British Legacies of *Corinne*," 180.

perhaps for Landon, in resignation. She concludes that femininity and enthusiasm can unite, but they cannot triumph over worldly woes including (but not limited) to romantic disappointment.

With its shorter length and tighter monologue form, "Erinna" "dramatizes the poet's dilemma" in ways that earlier poems like *The Improvisatrice* could not[85]; however, it should be read as intermediary conceptual and technical step rather than the final, fully developed version of Landon's enthusiast monologue. Indeed, Landon's focus on the consciousness and voice of a single character in "Erinna" helps develop the female enthusiast toward a figure of interest in her own right. At the same time, she helps propel the nascent dramatic monologue toward a more self-contained form for effectively staging an inquiry into a poetic psychology detached from the poet herself. As Adriana Craciun observes, however, the extreme interest in *The Improvisatrice* and "Erinna" shown by early recoverers of Landon has drawn critical attention away from later poems that offer valuable alternatives to the "self-destructive currents" of her early poetry on the intersections of women's romantic and poetic identities. Craciun reads "The Prophetess" as one of several late-career works in which Landon demonstrates the inescapability of "destruction and decay" for women of genius while not depriving them of their expressive power.[86] My reading adds to Craciun's a historical framework for understanding the poem's mantic speaker within Landon's continued meditations on enthusiasm as companion to and agent of destruction. "The Prophetess" thus illustrates the two developments central to this chapter: 1) Landon's refinement of the evolving dramatic monologue form to better accommodate a range of women's embodied experiences, and 2) Landon's expansion of female enthusiast identity to include religious models that do not suffer from the stigma attached particular enthusiastic sects. This poem exemplifies

[85] Sypher, *Biography*, 97.

[86] Adriana Craciun, *Fatal Women of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 196. For the poetess-centered focus of Landon's early recovery, see Lootens, "Receiving the Legend," 242-43.

Landon's late-career move away from the narrative limitations of Sapphic and Corinne-esque *improvisatrice* models toward a more inclusive group of unfamiliar historical poetesses, fictional characters, and women with religiously oriented powers of inspiration.

"The Prophetess" differs markedly from *The Improvisatrice* and "Erinna" in terms of its publishing history, the demands of which help explain how Landon's innovations to the dramatic monologue help establish it as a form for accommodating female enthusiast voices. Editors Jerome McGann and Daniel Riess date the poem's composition to 1837,[87] and, as with Landon's other gift book contributions, "The Prophetess" served as a "poetical illustration" to a plate engraving.[88] This production matrix complicates Landon's signature motif of painting female enthusiast figures. In effect, "The Prophetess" literalizes the particularized setting and premise of "Sappho's Song" but places Landon, not the Improvisatrice, in the position of poet-illustrator. The presence of an actual image also alleviates Landon's poem from the imperative to describe the prophetess or her graven image; she can commence with the prophetess's speech instead. This change in content also reflects readerly expectations. Engravings in literary annuals were understood as jumping off points for poets working on commission, not authoritative images of characters or speakers conceived in the poem.[89] As Landon put it, "mere description" was "certainly not the most popular species of composition" for such a venue. Blanchard confirms Landon's reluctance to describe; instead, he argues, she "found something pointed, something

[87] *Letitia Elizabeth Landon: Selected Writings*, 469. The volume's title page notes, in place of an author line, "With poetical illustrations by L. E. L." (catalog entry for *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap-Book* [London: Fisher, Son, & Co., 1838], National Gallery of Art Library, AY10 .F57 1838, accessed May 28, 2018, https://library.nga.gov/mercury/search?searchArg=fisher%27s+drawing+room&sk=default&limitTo=none&recCount=20&searchType=1&searchCode=GKEY%5E*).

[88] See Figure 6: "The Prophetess," in *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap-book* (London: Fisher, Son, &. Co., 1838), n.p. *Google Books* (digitized from Oxford University, 2009), accessed December 2, 2018, https://books.google.com/books?id=49BbAAAAQAAJ&source=gbs_navlinks_s.

[89] See Cope, "Letitia Landon and the Sewn-Together Subject," 377-78; and Robinson, introduction, xvi-xvii.

touching or eloquent to say" about each commission, which gave her "opportunities of exercising her matured powers."[90] Either due to formal constraints or personal preferences, Landon chooses not to describe her Prophetess, and this short poem has no preface, "Introductory Notice," or epigraph, as gift books did not usually accommodate such paratexts. "The Prophetess" differs from Landon's earlier monologues in part because of its minimal context, which only intensifies with republication in *The Zenana, and Minor Poems of L. E. L.* (1839), and with later volumes of collected works that include the poem but not the original *Fisher's* engraving. To mitigate these limitations, Landon could have identified her speaker with a name recognizable from history, mythology, or Christian scripture. But she did not, instead returning the model of her unnamed Improvisatrice to focus on a type rather than an individual character. Readers approach the monologue knowing only that the speaker is a woman, and that she prophesies. They soon learn that she is also yet another female enthusiast in the gallery that is Landon's poetic *oeuvre*.

The poem's original context would also have constrained its length, further discouraging explicit characterization within the poem and contributing to Landon's choice of rhyme scheme and style of address. In a decisive shift from "Erinna"'s winding blank-verse reflections and subtle apostrophes—both more in line with Romantic lyric conventions—"The Prophetess" treats monologue as a speech fit for the stage. Landon's 23 iambic pentameter triplets and majority of end-stopped lines suggest forceful, emphatic delivery of spoken word, not wandering recollection of passing thoughts. Whereas, in "Erinna," apostrophe periodically encroaches to foreground the speaker and to provide an absent target for Erinna's musings, address in "The Prophetess" takes the form of summonings, incantations, and fearful prophecies. Landon's use of

[90] Blanchard, *Life and Literary Remains*, I, 97-98. In her earlier memoir, Roberts notes that Landon initially found her work for *Fisher's* tedious and uninspiring: "she looked upon it as a mere collection of engravings, to which it was no easy task to give any poetical interest." Later, however, Landon told Fisher that "[s]ome of [her] very best poems" had been written for the scrap-book (Roberts, "Memoir," 26 and n).

enthusiasm thus reinforces the poem's prophetic content rather than explaining the development of its poetess. The individual serves the message, not the other way round. Landon structures the poem's movements around its four apostrophes: the Prophetess summons ethereal powers in Stanza 1, chides the "old world" in Stanza 11, and commands the spirits again in Stanzas 15 and 21. Together, these movements show the Prophetess's power to commune with the otherworldly, to tell forth present corruptions, and to foretell the destruction of the world as she knows it.

Landon's first section explains where, how, and why the Prophetess summons spirits, granting insight into how she understands her enthusiasm and its connections to occult forces. "In the deep silence of the midnight hours," the speaker exclaims, "I call upon ye, oh viewless powers!"[91] Landon builds into the monologue a minimized setting—"midnight"—which has the dual function of describing the requirements of Prophetess's summons and leaving ambiguous whether it is a singular or recurring event. Landon's invocation of "viewless powers" in this poem reflects a shared affinity for the ethereal among second-generation Romantics. Felicia Hemans uses the phrase in several poems from the 1820s and 1830s, and, more canonically, it loosely echoes the "unseen Power" of P. B. Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" (1817).[92] For Landon, as for her contemporaries, the "presence" of airy beings cows "mortal daring" (line 3), but the Prophetess considers herself no ordinary mortal: "I have subdued ye to my own stern will, I fear ye not" (lines 4-5). Cognizant and in control of her own enthusiasm, she can subdue the powers she calls even though she fears their "awful purpose" (line 6). Two reasons emerge

[91] Letitia Elizabeth Landon, "The Prophetess," in *The Zenana, and Minor Poems of L. E. L.* (London: Fisher, Son, & Co., [1839]), 284-88, lines 1-2; hereafter cited parenthetically.

[92] See Felicia Hemans, "Superstition and Revelation," XIII, line 10; and "Druid Chorus on the Landing of the Romans," line 1; for close approximations, see "Modern Greece," LXII, lines 1, 5, LXIII, line 4; and "Fairy Favours," line 43 (in *The Poems of Felicia Hemans* [Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1872]). Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," in *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Edited by Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 3 vols. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), line 1. (According to Blanchard, Landon deemed Shelley "[of] all poets . . . most poetical" [*Life and Literary Remains*, I, 151].)

for her intrepidity. First, she "call[s] the æther-born" on behalf of others, not herself; second, her knowledge and attendant suffering have inured her to their frights (lines 6, 7). In these early stanzas of "The Prophetess," a poem published twelve years after "Erinna," we see Landon's sustained preoccupation with the effects of special knowledge on social connections. We also see how the passage of time has changed Landon's philosophy of enthusiasm. When the Prophetess explains that "the empire of the mind" is "[d]early . . . bought," and that it separates rather than connects, we recall the tension between Landon's epigraph to "Erinna" and the early lines of the poem itself. Landon also reuses "kind": in "The Prophetess," the mind "sitteth on a sullen throne, designed / To elevate and part it from its kind" (lines 10-12). Alienation becomes the expressed purpose—not a side effect—of mental elevation, and the Prophetess has long endured it.[93]

Landon presents a much less equivocal view of female enthusiasm in this poem than in previous examples, a simplification that reflects formal as well as ideological shifts. In such a short monologue, Landon has little space to develop an enthusiastic speaker who changes over time; moreover, while we do not know the Prophetess's age, she seems much older than Erinna and the Improvisatrice, more secure in her opinions. Rather than cherish childhood's "sweet dreams" like Erinna, the Prophetess disdains them as "false," "[w]orthless," and "hollow," and consigns them to "the dark grave of unbelief" (lines 14-17). The Prophetess arrives in a matter of lines at a conclusion that takes Erinna pages to reach: "Love, hope, ambition," and all former dreams were only phantoms (line 20). Knowledge proves a sobering companion for the female enthusiast. In the seventh stanza, Landon shifts unexpectedly to first-person plural, suggesting more diffuse notions of inspiration and agency. After claiming, "Knowledge is with me," and revealing that the formerly welcomed sentiments no longer visit her, the Prophetess summarizes the change that has occurred: "we disdain what formerly had grieved" (lines 19-21). With no

[93] See Craciun, *Fatal Women of Romanticism*, 199, 200.

fond memories of a lover or a sacred place, she sees the "few fair flowers" in view as springing from "corruption and death," not love or inspiration (lines 22, 24). But, in this later phase of Landon's writing about female enthusiasm, internal proves no better than external inspiration. Wearied of dreams, "we look within: / What do we find? Guile, suffering, and sin" (lines 26-27). These corruptions find three counterparts in the "gilded sophistry" of what the Prophetess refers to as "my kind": "Hate, sorrow, falsehood" (lines 28-30). It remains unclear how Landon defines "kind" here. Does she mean prophets, or anyone with special knowledge? And to what extent does she blame the group for its duplicitousness? Given other strange pronoun-antecedent combinations in this poem, Landon may simply not have taken great care in its details. On the other hand, she may have intended the resulting blurring of prophet and prophesying, enthusiast and enthusiasm. If that is the case, then Landon has adopted the much more bitter view that the female enthusiast not only experiences, but is complicit in, the degradation of her art and status.

The female enthusiast speaker does not limit her vitriol to her "kind," however, and Landon uses the poem's remaining apostrophes to explain why the Prophetess responds to the "mean," "small" "old world" by calling up spirits (line 31). She has taken a "lingering interest" in her "ancestral city" and summons ethereal powers for its sake (lines 31, 34, 35). "Spirits!" she calls, "my incense summons ye above" to consider "yon stately city" wherein reside "[a]ll the high honours of the human mind!" (lines 45, 46, 48). "The poet's wreath" is among these honors, but the Prophetess does not claim it for herself (line 47). Instead, her mantic speech takes a more ritualistic form in keeping with her designation as "prophetess," not poetess or *improvisatrice*. Landon adds incense, "silvery smoke," "a distant vision," and the image of "scrolls" containing "the world's deep wisdom," echoing biblical images and terminology like the guiding "pillar of a

cloud," Daniel's sealed prophecies, and the scroll of Revelation (lines 51-53).[94] As arbiter of these emblems, the Prophetess claims for herself an older, more authoritative form of inspiration that poets like Landon herself had partially relinquished in adjoining the *improvisatrice* model to prophetic enthusiasm. Rather than exhibiting special knowledge of others' romantic travails (as with the Improvisatrice) or her own waning inspiration (as with Erinna), the Prophetess predicts a city's devastation. "What of her future?" she asks (line 52). Her prophecy envisions a "desert" with "ruins" in two stanzas indebted or even responding (as Craciun suggests) to P. B. Shelley's "Ozymandias" (lines 58-59).[95] But unlike Shelley's traveling speaker, Landon's Prophetess sees the future, not the past. Her vision of destruction seems imminent, and it seems complete.

Unlike many biblical prophecies, however, Landon's carries no prescription for how to avoid this fate, nor is there even an audience for such a warning. The Prophetess speaks to ethereal powers alone, not to any human auditor, which affects both the scope of her enthusiasm and the dynamic of Landon's monologue. The poem ends anticlimactically: the "Hence" of line 64 clarifies that the "dark spirits" have been the intended auditors of this entire monologue, despite the momentary address to the "old world" in Stanza 11. Due to the impending decay, but perhaps also because visions have previously deceived the Prophetess, she commands the spirits to "bear the dream away." But lest her readers hope that removing the dream will cancel its prediction, Landon finishes the monologue with five proclamations that extend beyond the city and the Prophetess to a universal application of her inspired words:

> To-morrow but repeateth yesterday;
> First, toil—then, desolation and decay.
> Life has one vast stern likeness in its gloom,

[94] See Exodus 13:21, Daniel 12:4, and Revelation 5:1, King James Version.

[95] Craciun, *Fatal Women of Romanticism*, 199. See also Michael O'Neill, "'Beautiful but Ideal': Intertextual Relations between Letitia Elizabeth Landon and Percy Bysshe Shelley," in *Fellow Romantics: Male and Female British Writers, 1790-1835*, ed. Beth Lau (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 211-229.

We toil with hopes that must themselves consume—
The wide world round us is one mighty tomb. (lines 65-69)

Landon reinforces this cyclical view of time by returning to earlier tropes. She again uses the first-person plural, identifying not only with her "kind" but also with a doomed world.[96] Like their self-consuming hopes, those who toil end up in the world's tomb as the cycle of "desolation and decay" grinds to a fatal halt. There is no redemption for the poem's setting or speaker, nor does Landon apologize for that pessimism. But it is significant that Landon does not imagine her enthusiast's end. Whereas *The Improvisatrice* finishes with the speaker's death and "Erinna" implies it through the prefatory account,[97] "The Prophetess" leaves its female enthusiast alive and in full control of her prophetic powers. In Craciun's reading, neither poetry nor truth "survives the desolation and decay," but I would suggest that they do, in a sense, because the Prophetess herself survives with her enthusiast identity intact.[98] She has successfully called the dark spirits, has prophesied ruin, and has delivered that prophecy up to forces outside herself. In Landon's late-career imagining of female enthusiasm, the woman's ability supersedes the apparent requirement of creating beauty with it; she can still create poetry and truth without painting portraits, singing songs, or wearing laurels. If she chooses, she can even contact spirits and foretell doom. Thus, as Landon expands her conception of the female enthusiast to include more ritualized, religious depictions of inspiration, she also imagines a new way of thinking

[96] The epigraph to *The Zenana, and Minor Poems of L. E. L.* reads: "'Alas! Hope is not prophecy,---we dream, but rarely does the glad fulfillment come: we leave our land---and we return no more!' L. E. L." (qtd. from Landon's "Shuhur, Jeypore," lines 9-11). It seems to have been a popular snippet among early Landon biographers, and may have been chosen by Emma Roberts or by Fisher. Other quoting biographies include Laman Blanchard, *Life and Literary Remains of L. E. L.*, 2 vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1841), I, 264; and Grant, "A Glance at the Life and Writings of L. E. L.," 212. The "ominous lines" also appear in Nelsie Brook's temperance novel *Gertrude Winn; or, Our Nation's Curse: how it works in homes* (London: William Tweedie, 1863), 274. More recently, Lootens quotes this epigraph at the beginning of her chapter, "Receiving the Legend," 242.

[97] For Landon's tendency to kill off her poetess-speakers, see Stephenson, "The Construction of L. E. L.," 4.

[98] Craciun, *Fatal Women of Romanticism*, 199.

about the inspired woman's relationship to tragedy. She frees her from the social imperatives of romance and ambition, and from a tragic death if she fails to meet those expectations.[99]

Landon's strategy of embodying enthusiasm in the dramatic lyric was shared by some of her contemporaries. Felicia Hemans certainly comes to mind, and scholars have shown her influence on the female dramatic monologue as it developed in the latter part of the Romantic period[100]; however, as this chapter has argued, Landon's work in the genre between 1824 and 1838 reveals a significant connection between the evolution of the dramatic monologue and the development of an expanded definition of female enthusiasm. Readers and reviewers recognized Landon as a critical thinker about enthusiastic poetics, and as an enthusiast herself. While publishing demands may have influenced Landon's move toward shorter, stand-alone monologues, her interest in female enthusiast figures and tropes also informs her refinement of the genre's relationship to lyric, and to its defining trope of characterization. Inversely, this development also carries significant implications for the history of the female enthusiast in the Romantic period. As Landon's monologues approach what we now consider standard for the form, they also support darker, more forceful, and more expansive views of enthusiasm and the ends to which it may be used by women.

Landon's character-driven poems explore the trials of genius for the nineteenth-century woman by giving voice to female enthusiasts of various ages, nationalities, religious persuasions, and poetic inclinations. "[S]he would expatiate with mournful eloquence on the trials with which

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[99] For "dying women" in Landon, see Pascoe, *Romantic Theatricality*, 229-43; qtd from 229.

[100] Scholars typically cite poems like "Corinna at the Capitol," "Woman and Fame," and "Properzia Rossi." For Hemans and poetess monologues, see An, "The Poetics of the 'Charmed Cup,'" 223, 227-28; Esterhammer, *Romanticism and Improvisation*, 93, 102-3; Susan J. Wolfson, *Borderlines: The Shiftings of Gender in British Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 69, 72-77; Louis, "Enlarging the Heart," 2-6, 8; Leighton, *Victorian Woman Poets*, 31-34, 38-40; and Susan J. Wolfson, "Gendering the Soul," in *Romantic Women Writers: Voices and Countervoices*, ed. Paula R. Feldman and Theresa M. Kelley (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995), 57, 63-65.

a literary life is fraught for woman," writes Sheppard; "the noble aspirations, the gifted mind, the warm heart, are so many daggers set with precious stones to a woman."[101] In other words, Landon's *oeuvre* has a representational quality that extends beyond the experience of the poet and, for that matter, of any individual woman; however, these details, many of them physicalized, remind readers that part of Landon's strength is her skillful embodiment of womanhood. Sheppard also claims that Landon's poetry could be excerpted to "form a history of a POET'S soul."[102] The theory that dramatic monologue "'overhear[s]' lyric in the interests of character formation" begs the questions: What character is the poet interested in forming? What speaker does the text create?[103] *The Improvisatrice*, "Erinna," and "The Prophetess" show Landon's vested interest in forming the character of the female enthusiast. Through overlappings of dramatic and lyric speech, she explores the liabilities of female genius and recontextualizes the singular poetic self as a fragmented subject.[104] This fragmented history plays out at significant remove from Landon's own identity. The form protects Landon by recreating her characteristics, her poetic theory, and even her "daggers" in a fictional character type. Landon does not seem to have been interested in forming *the* Sappho anew, but in collecting from many female enthusiasts the character of *a* Sappho. Her body of poetry, and particularly her career-long experimentation with dramatic monologue, thus forms a history of the poetic soul of female enthusiasm. And while that history does not fully escape the compromises and tragedies

[101] Sheppard, *Genius and Writings*, 12-13.

[102] Sheppard, *Genius and Writings*, 47. For Landon's eloquence, see also Roberts, "Memoir," 14; and Clementia Grant, "A Glance at the Life and Writings of L. E. L.," in *The Ladies' Companion and Monthly Magazine*, vol. IV, second series (London: Rogerson and Tuxford, 1853), 209. For eloquence as a shared feature of the Improvisatrice and Erinna, see Melissa Ianetta, "'To Elevate I Must First Soften': Rhetoric, Aesthetic, and the Sublime Traditions," *College English* 67.4 (2005): 414.

[103] Tucker, "Dramatic Monologue, 146; cf. 153.

[104] G. Byron, "Rethinking the Dramatic Monologue," 81; cf. 84-85. Along similar lines, Simpson points to Landon's varying of meter and rhyme patterns as a way to "blur and destabilize characters rather than to delineate them" (*Literary Minstrelsy*, 63).

attendant on women's genius during Landon's life, it does imagine new possibilities for a woman who is able to outlive them.

CHAPTER 4: CONFLICTED ENTHUSIASM AND MARIA JANE JEWSBURY'S HISTORIES

As an anonymous reviewer for the *Athenaeum* in 1831, Maria Jane Jewsbury (1800–1833) took a hard line on enthusiasm. She thought Percy Bysshe Shelley's lofty poetics made him "a winged head, unable to walk the earth, but at home when soaring through the sky,"[1] and she treated with even greater severity the enthusiasts among her fellow women writers. Letitia Elizabeth Landon received the most thorough lashing: "Glowing with imagery, radiant with bright words, seductive with fond fancies," her poetry "yet lacked vigour and variety—often abounded in carelessness, and dealt too much in the superficial." In other words, Jewsbury the reviewer "wished that L. E. L. would dig till she reached the rock."[2] These reviews show Jewsbury's frustration with the lack of solidity in Romantic poetics; moreover, when viewed in isolation, their apparent disdain for feminized tropes of enthusiasm sets Jewsbury at odds with the standard feminist narrative that presumes exceptional women to subvert—not affirm—

[1] [Maria Jane Jewsbury,] "Shelley's 'Wandering Jew,' *The Athenaeum* 194 (July 16, 1831): 457; and [Maria Jane Jewsbury,] "The Book of the Seasons, or, the Calendar of Nature," *The Athenaeum* 175 (March 5, 1831): 148. See also Susan J. Wolfson, *Borderlines: The Shiftings of Gender in British Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 340n32; Joanna Wilkes, "'Only the Broken Music'? The Critical Writings of Maria Jane Jewsbury," *Women's Writing* 7.1 (2000): 116-17; and Monica Correa Fryckstedt, "The Hidden Rill: the Life and Career of Maria Jane Jewsbury: II," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 67.1 (1984): 465.

[2] [Maria Jane Jewsbury,] "*Romance and Reality*. By L. E. L., Author of 'The Improvisatrice,' &c.," *The Athenaeum* 215 (December 10, 1831): 793. By contrast, Jewsbury argues that Felicia Hemans's "admirable taste . . . has entirely preserved her from . . . the besetting sins of our imaginative literature" ([Maria Jane Jewsbury,] "Original Papers: Literary Sketches, No. 1. Felicia Hemans," *The Athenaeum* 172 [February 12, 1831]: 105). For attribution of these anonymously published reviews, see Fryckstedt, "The Hidden Rill: II," 471, 473.

historical gender stereotypes.[3] Jewsbury's approach is more complicated. She likely adopts a masculine style in these reviews to protect her anonymity, but she nevertheless critiques poetic enthusiasm along the gendered lines articulated by her male colleagues and sanctioned by the social and religious systems of her day. Jewsbury values "intense yet rational feeling" and "real, yet not ungovernable energy of soul,"[4] but she also warns that many women miss those marks in their enthusiastic verse. She argues that enthusiasm, if unregulated, compromises women's authority by making their work inconsequential at best or, at worst, detrimental to their reputations and careers.

Little would readers have guessed that such harsh words were penned by the author of *The History of an Enthusiast* (1830), a novella that treats female enthusiasm and the ambitious woman writer with cautious sympathy.[5] Jewsbury's heroine, Julia Osborne, elicits admiration for her success as a novelist, but her social downfall warns young women against unbridled literary ambition. *History*'s conflicted appraisal of the female enthusiast trope shows that Jewsbury, like Mary Shelley and Letitia Elizabeth Landon, had no singular answer to the conundrum enthusiasm raises for Romantic-era women's subjectivity; this novella represents only one chapter in Jewsbury's history of the female enthusiast. Many critics have read *History* as Jewsbury's singular moment of interest in these issues, but such readings suffer from the blinders of the secularization thesis in feminist literary criticism, especially on Romantic-period women's writing. Because second-wave feminism's recovery efforts tended to privilege the subversive and the secular in Jewsbury's *oeuvre*, our perception has been largely founded on the three roles that

[3] Joanna Wilkes fits Jewsbury's criticism into this narrative by focusing on her laudatory reviews of Jane Austen and Felicia Hemans. See "'Without Impropriety': Maria Jane Jewsbury on Jane Austen," *Persuasions* 13 (1991): 33-38; and Wilkes, "'Only the Broken Music,'" 110-116.

[4] [Jewsbury,] "*Romance and Reality*," 793.

[5] *The History of an Enthusiast* joins two other novellas, *The History of a Nonchalant* and *The History of a Realist* in Jewsbury's 1830 collection, *The Three Histories*. See Fryckstedt, "The Hidden Rill: II," 450.

make her most "Romantic": her Wordsworthian discipleship, her *Athenaeum* reviewership, and her relatively progressive view of female authorship in *The History of an Enthusiast*.[6] Inattention to Jewsbury's religious writing of 1828 and 1829 has limited our understanding of how Jewsbury conceptualizes enthusiasm and its influence on gendered notions of poetic identity.

Instead of a noteworthy blip in an otherwise too-conservative career, Jewsbury's novella represents the fictional center of a career-long obsession with female enthusiasm that relied on many genres to negotiate cultural, poetic, and religious claims on women's genius. In this chapter, I trace Jewsbury's longer history with enthusiasm, exploring nearly a decade of religious, critical, and poetic texts devoted to the female enthusiast, her womanhood, and her writing: all issues as essential to Jewsbury's conception of her own identity as she saw them to be for other women writers. Whereas most scholars who acknowledge Jewsbury's religiosity confine its influence to the three-year period in which she composed and published *Letters to the Young* (1828) and *Lays of Leisure Hours* (1829),[7] I argue that the post-conversion ideals articulated in these texts significantly inform how she conceptualizes female enthusiasm in *The*

[6] Other than the "spiritual crisis" that "aggravated" her long illness, Joanna Wilkes's *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry makes no mention of Jewsbury's religion ("Jewsbury [*married name* Fletcher], Maria Jane [1800-1833], in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004], accessed on February 14, 2017, http://www.oxforddnb.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/view/article/14816). For Jewsbury and Wordsworth, see Susan J. Wolfson, "Romanticism & Gender & Melancholy," *Studies in Romanticism* 53.3 (2014): 448-49; Wolfson, *Borderlines*, 79, 338n14-15; Dennis Low, *The Literary Protégées of the Lake Poets* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 152-58; Norma Clarke, *Ambitious Heights: Writing, Friendship, Love—The Jewsbury Sisters, Felicia Hemans, and Jane Welsh Carlyle* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 10, 61-68, 73; Monica Correa Fryckstedt, "The Hidden Rill: the Life and Career of Maria Jane Jewsbury: I," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 67.1 (1984): 182-84; and Eric Gillett, *Maria Jane Jewsbury: Occasional Papers, selected with a Memoir* (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), xix-xxv. Katherine Singer rejects the notion of Jewsbury as "idle Wordsworthian devotee" ("Wordsworthian Vision, Moving Picture Shows, and the Ethics of the Moving Image in Maria Jane Jewsbury's *The Oceanides*," *European Romantic Review* 23.5 [2012]: 534-35). For Jewsbury as reviewer, see Joanna Wilkes, *Women Reviewing Women in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Critical Reception of Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 24ff; and note 3 above.

[7] See Wolfson, *Borderlines*, 106, 130; Harriet Devine Jump, "'My Dearest Geraldine': Maria Jane Jewsbury's Letters," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 81.1 (1999): 67, 70; Clarke, *Ambitious Heights*, 12, 73, 83; Gillett, *Maria Jane Jewsbury*, xxxv-xxxviii; and Fryckstedt, "The Hidden Rill: I," 195-98. Fryckstedt concedes that Jewsbury's crisis of faith in 1826 lead her to value Christian faith over fame in *The Three Histories* ("The Hidden Rill: II," 458) but does not explore connections between the *Histories* and Jewsbury's texts from that conversion period.

History of an Enthusiast,[8] and the terms upon which she critiques it in her later reviews. Even as Jewsbury seems resolved in the 1830s that Christianity can tame poetic enthusiasm, her prior work reveals deep conflicts between religious and secular models of poetic fervor. Furthermore, by rereading *History*'s Julia Osborne in this context, we see how Jewsbury's heroine embodies a conflicted idea of female enthusiasm and disrupts a secularized view of women's authority and genius.

By situating *History* within this longer trajectory, we can better understand the productive tension between Jewsbury's late-onset Evangelicalism and the professional ambitions that began with her fledgling poetry. This chapter focuses primarily on Jewsbury's work between 1828 and 1830—from her sickbed conversion to the beginning of her work as an *Athenaeum* reviewer—as the climax of this arc, as well as the most neglected portion of her narrative. I begin by analyzing Jewsbury's critiques of enthusiasm in *Letters to the Young*, an epistolary conduct book that prescribes religious regulation for youthful ambition. Jewsbury's subsequent poetry collection, *Lays of Leisure Hours*, represents a more diffuse meditation on the subject from the perspective of a poet caught between religious and professional demands, between devotion to God and to literary fame. In this context, I reread Jewsbury's *History* as a continuation of her thinking on women's access to and cultivation of enthusiast, poetess, and genius identities through the character of Julia Osborne. Along with shifts in British Christianity and Romantic poetics, factors like audience, genre, and purpose help explain the moving target of Jewsbury's enthusiasm. By re-inscribing changing religious views onto her love-hate relationship with enthusiasm, we see anew her interactions with the concept. For Jewsbury, "enthusiast" is the only authentic identity for a woman of genius; unfortunately, it is also the identity least available

[8] See Wolfson, "Romanticism & Gender & Melancholy," 449; and Susan J. Wolfson, "Gendering the Soul," in *Romantic Women Writers: Voices and Countervoices*, ed. Paula R. Feldman and Theresa M. Kelley (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1995), 33-68, esp. 53.

to her amidst the conflicting views of the woman writer's religious and professional roles in her cultural moment.

I. *Letters to the Young* (1828)

First printed in 1828 by Evangelical-leaning publisher J. Hatchard and Son and quickly picked up by American religious presses,[9] *Letters to the Young* was praised by reviewers on both sides of the pond in Horatian terms as "delightful and edifying."[10] The volume claims to reproduce fourteen letters (seventeen in later editions) of the author's "real, and not . . . fictitious correspondence" with her younger acquaintances. Penned during Jewsbury's illness-induced seclusion at Leamington from April 1826 to the early months of 1828, the epistles range in topic from practical study habits to "the true value of Life."[11] For decades, scholars assumed that the

[9] Maria Jane Jewsbury, *Letters to the Young* (London: J. Hatchard and Son, 1828). Hatchard published three subsequent editions: the 1829 second edition, the expanded third edition of 1832, and a final printing of the expanded text in 1837. I have taken the 1828 London edition as copy text in this chapter and will cite it hereafter as *Letters*. The expanded third edition is hereafter cited as *Letters* (1832). A prominent London publisher throughout the Romantic period, John Hatchard had been known to favor texts of Tory or Evangelical bent. He was Hannah More's publisher in the 1790s and remained closely affiliated with the Clapham Sect until his retirement in 1845. See Mark Pottle, "Hatchard, John (1768–1849), publisher and bookseller," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), accessed November 21, 2018, http://www.oxforddnb.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-12590. In America, *Letters to the Young* was first published in Philadelphia by the Presbyterian Board of Publication in 1828, and was reprinted regularly by other publishers until 1842. Other American versions were published under the titles *Letters of Maria Jane Jewsbury, addressed to her Young Friends, to which is added, Legh Richmond's Advice to his Daughters* (Boston: Perkins & Marvin, 1829); and *Light for the Young, in a Series of Letters* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1851). Both cast the text as a religious guide for young people, aged 15-25/30 years. The addition of parental advice from Rev. Legh Richmond (1772-1827) adds a more heavy-handed solemnity to Jewsbury's text. See esp. pp. 169-80 in the 1829 text cited above. Search results from *WorldCat FirstSearch*, accessed February 1, 2017.

[10] "*Letters to the Young*. By Maria Jane Jewsbury," *The Eclectic Review* 30 (July 1828): 75. For another laudatory review, see "*Letters to the Young*. By Maria Jane Jewsbury," *The Literary Gazette* 800 (May 19, 1832): 309. According to Dora Wordsworth, her father "was much pleased with . . . letters to The Young" as well, but she does not mention her own opinion of the volume ("Letter 15," in *Letters of Dora Wordsworth*, ed. Howard P. Vincent [Chicago: Packard and Company, 1944], 45). According to Jewsbury's preface, these letters gained public view on the advice of a "valued friend." Jump presumes Miss Kelsall, one of Jewsbury's mentors at Poplar Grove, as the volume's dedicatee ("'My Dearest Geraldine,'" 70-71).

[11] Jewsbury, "Advertisement" to *Letters*, qtd. in Jump, "'My Dearest Geraldine,'" 69; Fryckstedt, "The Hidden Rill: I," 196. For *Letters*'s composition and publication history, see Jump, "'My Dearest Geraldine,'" 65-66; and Wilkes, "Jewsbury, Maria Jane," *ODNB*. Two periodical obituaries from 1834 confirm this publication anecdote ("Mrs. Fletcher," *The Athenaeum* 347 [June 21, 1834], 473; and "Memoirs of Persons Recently Deceased: Mrs Fletcher,"

bulk of these letters was originally addressed Jewsbury's younger sister Geraldine, and many have read the volume as a lengthy admonition from the maternal older sister to a young woman she views as the reincarnation of her ambitious self.[12] Harriet Devine Jump has disproven this theory by establishing *Letters to the Young*'s primary source material as a series of letters written to pupils at Poplar Grove between May and November of 1827, joined by one letter to Geraldine and possibly two letters to Dora Wordsworth, both written during the same period. Jump determines that Jewsbury's epistles were originally written to advise boys and girls of various ages, not solely to target Geraldine's youthful literary ambitions.[13] *Letters to the Young* thus meditates on young persons' enthusiastic tendencies by combing the author's experience, not her sister's, for cautionary examples. Jewsbury establishes her own authority as a recovering enthusiast, and then she employs class-based religious critiques, extended metaphors, scriptural examples, and personal anecdotes to explain the dangers of enthusiasm, as well as methods for its successful regulation.

Jewsbury's acknowledged success as "instructress" in *Letters* can be attributed in part to this mixing of epistolary conduct book and fictionalized (auto)biography.[14] As one reviewer put

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The Metropolitan Magazine 10.39 [July 1834]: 103). William and Dorothy Wordsworth's letters of June 18, 1826, and May 21, 1828 also support the timeline (*The Letters of Dorothy and William Wordsworth*, 8 vols., ed. Alan G. Hill from the first edition, ed. Ernest de Selincourt [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978], III, 455, 606).

[12] See Gillett, *Maria Jane Jewsbury*, xxxv-xxxvi; Clarke, *Ambitious Heights*, 10, 70-73, 169; Wilkes, "'Without Impropriety,'" 34; "Maria Jane Jewsbury Chronology," in *The Oceanides*, ed. Judith Pascoe, *Romantic Circles Electronic Editions*, gen. ed. Neil Fraistat and Steven E. Jones (University of Maryland, 2003), accessed February 20, 2017, https://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/oceanides/chronology.html; Wolfson, *Borderlines*, 106. Fryckstedt avoids definitively linking *Letters* to Jewsbury's correspondence with Geraldine ("The Hidden Rill: I, 196-97).

[13] Jump, "'My Dearest Geraldine,'" 66, 69; cf. 70.

[14] "*The Three Histories*. The History of an Enthusiast. The History of a Nonchalant. The History of a Realist. By Maria Jane Jewsbury," *The Eclectic Review* 4 (Oct. 1830): 350. Advertisements for the first edition of *Letters* puzzle over its proper generic label. *The Eclectic Review*, *The Monthly Review*, and *The New Monthly Magazine* all catalog it under "Miscellaneous." See "List of Works Recently Published," *The Eclectic Review* 30 (July 1828): 96; "Monthly List of Recent Publications," *The Monthly Review* 8.39 (July 1828): 425; and "List of New Publications," *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* 24.91 (July 1828): 315.

it, the *Letters* "are fraught with that practical wisdom which can be gathered only from extensive observation and experience by a person habituated to self-reflection."[15] Jewsbury openly works from her own history, retroactively applying the Evangelicalism she learned at Poplar Grove to her early literary career, and then digesting those recollections as advice for a general adolescent audience. Moreover, the epistolary form helps create solidarity between the twenty-seven-year-old sage and her even younger readers as she model the introspection and personal reformation she hopes to cultivate in her individual recipients and, later, in her broader readership. Jewsbury pitches *Letters* as a wide-ranging, topical instruction manual for children, but she targets the most passionate, most curious, and therefore most vulnerable representatives of Romantic-era youth by identifying with their temptations. In Jewsbury's words, the volume's ideal readers are young people "whose 'events are emotions;' whose principles are impulses; whose feelings are passions; whose changes are contradictions; to whose whole moral existence enthusiasm is a never setting sun" (*Letters*, 178). Jewsbury identifies the young enthusiast with catchwords—"emotion," "impulse," "feeling," "passion"—but she also highlights the importance of degree by substituting these features for "principles." The sun metaphor also exemplifies the persistent tension in this text between Jewsbury's sense of enthusiasm as God-given, naturally occurring, and naturally variable, and her conviction that too much exposure to it can cause damage.

Jewsbury, like many of her Romantic-era contemporaries, imagines enthusiasm as a continuum of strong feeling ranging from the lofty emotion of genteel poets to the fanatical zeal of working-class prophets. In many ways, Jewsbury's letters reinforce the literary disdain for

[15] "*The Three Histories*," *The Eclectic Review*, 350. See also "*Letters to the Young*," *The Eclectic Review*, 75-76. The phrase "habituated to self-reflection" echoes Hannah More's *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* (1809), which prescribes a female education that "habituates to reflection" and religious devotion (Hannah More, *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*, ed. Patricia Demers [Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview, 2007], 48; see also 193). For commentary on reflective practices in More's novel, see Rachael Isom, "'Habituat[ing] to Reflection': Hannah More's Romantic Novel," *Essays in Romanticism* 23.1 (2016): 95-112.

enthusiastic "vulgarity" we saw in P. B. Shelley's poetics, especially as she seeks to protect susceptible young people from sliding down the social hierarchy toward less acceptable displays of enthusiasm. In Letter II, for example, Jewsbury combines nature metaphors with class-based distinctions to show young enthusiasts or would-be enthusiasts the fine line between enlightening and corrupting uses of their abilities: "The storms of passion, the wild beatings of ungoverned sensibility, and the reckless energies of impulse, will be recognised as what they really are—attractions of a second-rate and vulgar cast" (*Letters*, 38-39). On the one hand, Jewsbury figures enthusiasm as natural disaster, which, like the earlier sun metaphor, suggests a natural part of human nature. But lest Jewsbury's readers think "the storms of passion" are beyond their control, she attributes those "wild beatings" to "ungoverned sensibility" and "reckless[ness]."[16] By calling uncontrolled passion "vulgar," Jewsbury joins earlier Romantics in demonizing "second-rate" enthusiasts, i.e. working-class prophets like Joanna Southcott.[17] Even though the definition has expanded by this time to include poetesses, *improvisatrices*, and ambitious literary women, the prophetic heritage still inflects concerns about enthusiasm's damage to one's reputation.

Jewsbury's cautionary allusions to vulgar, prophetic enthusiasm gain force through her allusions to scripture and to the fire imagery that persists into Romantic-period critiques of the concept. Letter XIX's long quotations from Old Testament prophecy speak to this conflicted view of divine inspiration. When Isaiah addresses "all ye that kindle a fire," he names a group

[16] While she does not address Jewsbury or her *Letters*, Claire Knowles discusses at length the ways in which Jewsbury's female contemporaries negotiated the issue of "sensibility," which I link closely to enthusiasm. See *Sensibility and Female Poetic Tradition, 1780-1860: The Legacy of Charlotte Smith* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 9-13.

[17] See Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 15; Susan Juster, *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 85; and Jasper Cragwall, *Lake Methodism: Polite Literature and Popular Religion in England, 1780-1830* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2013), 192. See also Chapters 1 and 2.

with which Jewsbury and her ambitious readers identified. But then he warns all who "compass [them]selves about with sparks" how easily they can succumb to the flames they stoke (187):

> [W]alk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. . . . Stand now with thine enchantments, and with the multitude of thy sorceries wherein thou hast laboured from thy youth. . . . Behold they shall be as stubble, the fire shall burn them, they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame.[18]

Unannounced and unattributed in Jewsbury's text, the prophecy merges with her equally pointed yet less dire warnings; moreover, Isaiah's use of possessive pronouns helps her link dangerous prophetic fire with the hubris of its false prophets. Isaiah's prophecy leaves room for a broad interpretation of that hubris, and Jewsbury's readers may have connected these biblical flame-stokers with Romantic-era revivals of the Prometheus myth, and with scientific interest in electricity during the period.[19] The fire, the enchantments, and the sorceries all belong to those who "have kindled" youthful sparks into an uncontrollable, mature flame, those who have committed "the error of finding God everywhere and justifying one's own impulses as his Word."[20] A spark of divine inspiration kindled for "profit" rather than praise becomes, for Jewsbury, a form of idolatry. When she casts her readers' enthusiastic gifts (and her own) as God-given, she also argues that they should serve religious purposes. *Letters* repeatedly warns against self-serving, ambitious kindling of the passions as a misuse of spiritual gifts.

Successful regulation of enthusiasm becomes a major theme in *Letters*, and Jewsbury's expanded 1832 edition seems particularly concerned with guiding young readers in tempering their strong feelings and lofty ambitions. Although not always directly juxtaposed in the text, forms of "regulate" appear just as many times as forms of "enthusiasm" in *Letters to the Young*;

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[18] *Letters*, 187. Isaiah 50:11, King James Version.

[19] Noteworthy examples include Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818), P. B. Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's translation of *Prometheus Bound* (1833).

[20] Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 6.

however, those numbers far underestimate the significance of regulatory practices in the volume since it often figures regulation through extended metaphors and biblical allusions.[21] Jewsbury's sympathy with her readership encourages a moderate approach: she does not insist on dousing the reader's lamp, only on keeping it "ever trimmed" so as to avoid an untenable flame (*Letters*, 179). She does acknowledge, however, that a propensity for trimming may be unlikely in young people with such strong flames. "[S]ensibility and self-command are not qualities that naturally go hand in hand," she admits in the expanded edition's final letter (*Letters* [1832], 261). This tension between strong feeling and willed control persists in Jewsbury's later career. Here, as in her later *History*, Jewsbury constructs a parental dialogue explaining to these "wild and wayward spirit[s]" the emotions they experience, and advising them in handling their enthusiasm through the "active operation" of "religious sentiment" (*Letters*, 177). But whereas her novella follows this advice to its logical (if tragic) ends, Jewsbury's letters channel her meditations into a step-by-step method for reconciling youthful enthusiasm with Christian restraint.

Health concerns pervade Jewsbury's discussions of restraint and regulation, which she figures as central to a healthy reader's regimen or as life-saving treatment to regulate the emotional and spiritual disorders of young people already in the throes of enthusiasm. The first strategy shows in Jewsbury's use of source material and in her repeated figuring of religious instruction as an elixir of sorts. For example, Letter II "entreat[s]" readers "to drink reverentially, deeply, constantly, at the unsealed fountain of glory, wisdom, beauty, power,—the eternal Word of God," casting scripture as a free, unlimited source of vivifying tonic (*Letters*, 37).[22] Similarly, Letter V calls "Religion . . . a life-giving, life-pervading spirit," which not only works as an elixir

[21] Forms of the verb "subdue" also make frequent appearances in the text; see esp. Letter XIX (184-97, esp. 195).

[22] See also Jewsbury's earlier quotation of Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel: "These writings form a fiery and godlike fountain of inspiration, of which the greatest of modern poets have never been weary of drinking; which has suggested to them their noblest images, and animated them for their sublimest flights" (*Letters*, 19).

of life, but it also operates as a vital medicine that treats irregularities with a "guiding, quickening, controlling influence" (*Letters*, 63).[23] The apparent need for purification reinforces common notions of the enthusiastic mind as infected or corrupted by false superstition and pride.[24] Jewsbury figures the Bible both as a hydrating fountain for the mind atrophied by improper reading, and as a dispensary of oral medication for the soul-sick enthusiast. This versatility responds to the range of Jewsbury's audience. She assures the aspiring Bible student that his or her "mind's vision will be purified" by the influence of scripture "to discern the analogy which subsists between the principles which give permanence to genius, and to those which ennoble and invigorate the soul" (*Letters*, 38). Jewsbury treats enthusiasm as a pre-existing condition, and she prescribes scriptural education to regulate its undesirable side effects.

In many cases, then, Jewsbury prescribes scriptural education less as a preventative measure than as a powerful antidote to spiritual maladies caused by overactive enthusiasm. She argues that "the intellectual study of the Bible is . . . absolutely indispensible" for the young enthusiast because it "afford[s] a salutary check to high-minded opinions of human intellect" by reinforcing humanity's inferiority to divine knowledge and power (*Letters*, 5). Jewsbury's multivalent use of "enthusiastic" here embraces artistic and religious definitions of the word as it was shifting in meaning at this time[25]: extraordinary adolescents like the girl she addresses regard their own talents with great zeal, but I would also suggest that, given Jewsbury's other references to inspiration and genius in this text, that the talents they possess may be of an

[23] Jump identifies a letter to Dora Wordsworth, dated October 24, 1826, as a nearly verbatim source for Letter V ("'My Dearest Geraldine,'" 67). Fryckstedt quotes the first portion, arguing that, for Jewsbury, "religion is joy and permeates all of life," as well as all of Jewsbury's letters ("The Hidden Rill: I," 196).

[24] For enthusiasm's links to physical malady and mental illness, see Mee, 10-11, 28, 135; and Juster, *Doomsayers*, 28-30, 39-40.

enthusiastic nature. Perhaps that is why "high-minded[ness]," a seemingly "innoxious" quality,[26] warrants limitation. And by characterizing the "check" on these enthusiastic ailments as "salutary," Jewsbury implicitly figures herself as a physician recommending regulation as conducive not only to humility but to physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. With scripture as her guide, Jewsbury conducts in *Letters* a symbolic checkup—taking vital signs, cataloguing symptoms, discussing case studies, and offering proven remedies. At the very least, she provides readers with the tools to self-diagnose and self-medicate.

Whereas Jewsbury argues that religious instruction provides a healthy dietary foundation and can serve as medicine in a pinch, she finds that a rigorous approach to more general reading strengthens the intellect. Like many religionists of the period, Jewsbury encourages her readers to substitute quality sustenance for the junk food available on the shelves of bookstores and circulating libraries. "[I]ntellectual abstractions," she argues, "afford the best counterpoise to a dreaming fancy" (*Letters*, 119). Such abstractions include "works of thought" and "moral philosophy," but only as written "by sound authors" and "men of genius" (*Letters*, 119). Thus, Jewsbury's "mental remedy" does not preclude secular texts or authors but instead advocates soundness in matters of morality and genius in matters of intellect. Jewsbury does caution against literature "that will kindle and increase the fancies and desires" her correspondent already possesses in excess (*Letters*, 163). With "kindle," she figures enthusiasm as a spark fanned into flame. In Letter XIX, novel reading becomes the accelerant:

> Ardent, ambitious, impatient of control, consumed even now by romantic fancies, tell me, how can you be happy without that principle which, by regulating your mind, would reconcile you to life as it is really constituted; not the life you now picture, nor that depicted in a novel, but the life of common occupations, relieved only by common pleasures? (*Letters*, 194)

Jewsbury's "mental remedy" for enthusiastic tendency does not completely rid the mind of its influence, but merely conditions enthusiastic nature. In fact, she encourages pursuit of "all that art, imagination, and science have placed within human reach," allowing philosophy, poetry, and even fiction in a well-regulated diet that stimulates the higher functions of the mind and rescues it from the idleness of "a dreaming fancy" (*Letters*, 160-61).[27]

Contemporary reviewers noted Jewsbury's physician-like approach to genius, its perils, and its cure, but they also viewed *Letters* as the gleanings of Jewsbury's personal experiences as a young enthusiast. *The Eclectic Review* characterizes Jewsbury as a harvester whose "superior and reflecting mind . . . gathers for [her] own use in the path of a varied experience."[28] This review does not consider Jewsbury's advice to be the source of "hearsay, or of reading, or of speculation. She evidently writes of what she has known, and she writes pertinently and wisely."[29] *The Literary Gazette* employs a similar agricultural metaphor but attends with greater nuance to the tension between Jewsbury's enthusiastic proclivities and her religious methods for chastening them. The writer hypothesizes that these "natural powers of her mind" have "received that best of cultivation, Christian philosophy," discerning *Letters*' regulatory principles in its very style. The "result," this review argues, is a beautiful, pure, thoughtful text.[30] So, not only does Jewsbury speak on enthusiasm with the authority of personal experience or observation, but

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[27] Recall Mary Shelley's references to "diseased fancy" in *The Last Man*, ed. Jane Blumberg with Nora Crook, in *The Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley*, gen. ed. Nora Crook with Pamela Clemit, 8 vols. (London: William Pickering, 1996), IV, 206. Perhaps the best-known Romantic-era meditation on this word is Samuel Taylor Coleridge's; see *Biographia Literaria: or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, vol. 7 in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 82-88. For Coleridge's linking of "fancy" and enthusiasm, see Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 12, 176.

[28] "*Letters to the Young*," *The Eclectic Review*, 75.

[29] "*Letters to the Young*," *The Eclectic Review*, 75-76.

[30] "*Letters to the Young*," *The Literary Gazette*, 309.

she also makes thoughtful, relevant applications for her readership. In Jewsbury's scheme of remedy, her snippets of advice are like medicinal herbs plucked from paths of her own experiential sowing, and then rendered as medicine for the next generation of enthusiasts.

Indeed, readers of *Letters* often learn more about Jewsbury's past struggles than about the predicaments of her original correspondents at Poplar Grove. For instance, in Letter V, she discloses her past struggles with melancholia: "I myself lived many years under a melancholy star, and therefore know, from personal experience, its pains, its pleasures, and its penalties" (*Letters*, 108).[31] When Jewsbury uses the past tense—"lived"—and quantifies time—"many years"—she implies that the melancholic period of her life has closed. This move allows Jewsbury the author to distance herself from Jewsbury the young enthusiast, to detach from that state and assert objectivity alongside intimate knowledge. In this letter, as well as in Letter XV, Jewsbury invokes "experience" as proof of her authority on the subject: "I speak from memory, alas! I speak from experience" (*Letters*, 149). Above all, the memories of her conversion-era experiences reinforce the necessity of regulation for productive applications of enthusiasm. In that same letter, she writes, "daily experience proves that regulated feeling can alone be lasting feeling" (151). Over time, Jewsbury determines that permanence of feeling depends on the ability to control it, to harness it into productive outlets. She asserts that the mind should rule the heart, especially when that heart exhibits the warmth of enthusiastic fervor.

About two-thirds of the way through *Letters*, Jewsbury's autobiographical meditations on enthusiasm, ambition, regulation, and fame begin to cohere around a single recipient, but also to more closely prefigure the psychological turmoil of Julia Osborne, the heroine of Jewsbury's later novella, *The History of an Enthusiast*. Jump conjectures that Letter XVI was "almost

[31] The 1832 edition and subsequent American reprintings read "under the start of melancholy." For melancholy in Jewsbury's other texts, see Wolfson, "Romanticism & Gender & Melancholy," 448-52.

certainly not addressed to Geraldine," but instead to a young woman Jewsbury mentioned in contemporaneous correspondence with her sister: "an enthusiast of fourteen—proud and ambitious as you were."[32] Thus, Jewsbury's advice is personal in two ways: it draws on her own experience, and on her former relaying of that experience to a younger sister experiencing similar temptations. Jump identifies this letter as Jewsbury's foremost meditation on "literary ambition," but I read Letters XVI, XVII, and XVIII together. They allow Jewsbury to work her personal reflections and individualized advice into a set of principles for young women grappling with the capacities and consequences of female enthusiasm. This group of epistles represents an important step in Jewsbury's conceptualization of enthusiasm as a point of tension between religious devotion and secular ambition, which she later considers at length in reference to *History*'s protagonist, Julia Osborne.

In addressing the mysterious fourteen-year-old enthusiast of Letter XVI, Jewsbury relies on many of the tactics I have already identified, but she increasingly looks to personal anecdotes as a way to identify with her young charge. "From having drawn [these feelings] out into action, and from having enjoyed and suffered their consequences," she writes, "I know too whence they come, and whither they tend" (157). Jewsbury outlines this girl's situation largely based on her own past rather than on received details about the new case:

> My love, you are ambitious;—vague, restless, ever-changing desires occupy your mind, and your heart is full of those fair shadows with which romance disguises reality. What kind of distinction is best worth having you have not yet decided; but, as least unattainable in the present state of society, perhaps your thoughts fix most frequently on intellectual celebrity. I say celebrity, for I do not believe that intellectual acquirements would fulfill your vision. (157-58)

[32] Jump, "'My Dearest Geraldine,'" 66, 69, underlining original. Jump quotes from what she calls "Letter 23" of the Jewsbury letters at the John Rylands Library, Maria Jane's letter to Geraldine of September 19, 1827 (69n15).

The description is delivered in the second person but feels more like a displaced memory, and Jewsbury reads into the girl's "vision" the contents of her mind and heart. Restlessness, fickle desires, and misleading fancies lead to a diagnosing of ambition for literary celebrity. Jewsbury draws a fine line here between "intellectual acquirements," which reasonably fall within her prescription for mental rigor through reading, and a desire for fame, which speaks to personal aggrandizement rather than improvement. Given their pairing in the table of contents, the next letter (XVII) likely addresses the same correspondent. The young woman admits, "'I am convinced . . . that my ambitious motives are wrong, but I feel that without them I should be miserable, and lose all power of exertion'" (164). If we assume the letters' chronology based on their grouping and continuity, then Jewsbury intimates—and thoroughly delineates—the girl's predicament before receiving all of its details. She melds what she hears and observes with assumptions based on her own past, drawing them out into what she believes are their likely causes and consequences; she may even influence how her reader discloses her own "motives."

Jewsbury's sympathy with this particular addressee makes her advice even more pointed than in other letters. Jewsbury encourages her recipient (and her broader readership), "surrender all you are, and all you possess, to his service" and "account your talents a delegated trust" (*Letters*, 158). Like the servant who receives five talents in Matthew 25, Jewsbury's readers have been apportioned considerable abilities, and she charges with investing these gifts properly. The letter belabors this point but is not unsympathetic to its difficulty. As a self-proclaimed five-talent servant, Jewsbury empathizes with her correspondent's objections to these prescribed methods of handling enthusiasm, and concedes that "toil[ing] . . . without the stimulus supplied by personal ambition" is "'a hard saying.'" Even so, she maintains, "[p]ersonal aggrandizement is the stately phantom, of which desire to glorify God was once the warm and living substance"

(*Letters*, 159). Paradoxically, Jewsbury figures religion as the bodily, present, tangible goal worthy of her readers' efforts, and fame as a ghost. For women in particular, she argues, chasing the phantom of ambition is foolhardy. Jewsbury advises that the odds of a woman attaining distinction are "one to ten thousand against," and that more frequently the pursuit results in "presumptuous mediocrity" rather than fame (161, 162). Jewsbury's pessimism here may reflect the uninspiring reception of her first book, *Phantasmagoria*; however, the fact that she published a volume of poetry the next year and a trio of novellas the year after that suggests that Jewsbury either came to view herself as an exception among women, or, more likely, that she continued to struggle with gendered rules about enthusiasm and authorship.

I close this section with Letter XVIII, the last of those Jewsbury may have addressed to this unnamed teenage female enthusiast, and an apt study of how her uses of "enthusiasm" outline its characterization two years later in *The History of an Enthusiast*. This letter reifies Jewsbury's idea of enthusiasm as a naturally occurring but insidiously seductive characteristic that must be overcome through stringent regulation. Early on, she figures it as a heavenly gift turned tool of Satan, a golden calf of sorts that diverts young people's spiritual attention away from God and toward their own gratification. The letter opens with a distressing list of "enchantments" that have "alienated" the recipient from God: " your heart is full of idols, your mind of vain fancies; you delight no longer in holy contemplations, or useful exertions" (*Letters*, 171). But for Jewsbury, the issue is not that enthusiastic pursuits are inherently evil but that they have commandeered the reader's loyalty. She grants that these "idols are of the purest gold," suggesting they bear some real value but can endanger the soul if given too much power (174). Among these "glittering and glorious" objects, Jewsbury lists "the stirrings of internal power; the longings after intellectual distinctions," and "the seductions of literature" (174-75). With

inspiration welling up inside her, the young enthusiast seeks intellectual acclaim through a pattern all too common in Romantic-era fiction. From Corinne to Julia Osborne, that tragic pattern comes to dominate the female enthusiast discourse. And, as Jewsbury reveals in *Letters*, it is one she herself had known "all well, too well" (*Letters*, 175).

Jewsbury's interpenetration of religious and poetic identity helps explain her vacillations between sympathy and critique, between embrace of and detachment from the female enthusiast. These seeming contradictions between her religious prose and her literary criticism become even more pronounced in the 1832 expanded edition. For example, *Letters*' careful hedging around the term "fancy" avoids a wholesale condemnation of poetic enthusiasm in Letter XXV, which grants that "melancholy fancies, form . . . part and parcel of every reflective and poetical mind" (*Letters* [1832], 241). Perhaps Jewsbury's sympathy with her 1830 enthusiast heroine influences this shift; Letter XXV declines to "ridicule such a mind's affecting sad fancies," instead condemning the literature that foments them. "[T]o treat the subject in a literary sense, . . . we *must* cast off the trammels of melancholy fancies," she urges; "they spoil poetry" (*Letters* [1832], 242; emphasis original). Jewsbury's evolving distinctions between natural strong feeling and self-promoting literary production reveal her ties to both sides of enthusiasm's coin, and her changes to *Letters to the Young* help catalog this evolution. The emergent relationship between Jewsbury as religionist and Jewsbury as reviewer is less a matter of contradiction than of mutual influence, an informing of one writerly mode by the other. As a Christian, she views genius as God-given and in need of regulation. As a writer, she evaluates the productions of genius according to this discerned need as it affects women.

II. *Lays of Leisure Hours* (1829)

Whereas *Letters to the Young* delivers universalized advice on enthusiasm, youthful ambition, and regulation from an authoritative perspective, Jewsbury's next book meditates on these concepts more intimately—and less definitively—through lyric poetry. *Lays of Leisure Hours*, published in 1829, also by J. Hatchard and Son, conceptualizes enthusiast identity by aggregating poetic speakers with various connections to poetic genius and religious consolation. Perhaps, in composing *Letters*, Jewsbury saw the need for a more creative, nuanced approach. Indeed, she was already plotting a shift to religious verse as *Letters* went to press in 1828 advertising a forthcoming collection of "LYRICS, SACRED AND MISCELLANEOUS" (*Letters*, [242]).[33] The next year, a version of this project did appear, but it received notably less acclaim than *Letters*. Jewsbury's *Lays* never saw a second edition, and it remains her most ignored work by critics who disdain the text's strong religious undertones or who suggest that, like many of Jewsbury's 1820s gift book contributions, it was written for money.[34] But these critiques neglect *Lays*' crucial role as a poetic transition between *Letters to the Young* and *Three Histories*, both in generic innovation and, more importantly, in Jewsbury's thinking about what it means for a woman to figure herself as an "enthusiast"—religiously and poetically speaking—in the 1820s.

[33] This page follows immediately on p. 241. I have retained the original case and line break used in the publication. The advertisement also contains six lines of verse, presumably a preview of the coming volume. This text does not appear in *Lays of Leisure Hours*, but since *Lyrics, Sacred and Miscellaneous* never appeared, we can with some certainty assume that Jewsbury changed the title rather than composing two separate books of poetry.

[34] Maria Jane Jewsbury, *Lays of Leisure Hours* (London: J. Hatchard and Son, 1829). Jewsbury's volume of poetry did not experience lasting popularity, but its title did. A *WorldCat* search returned no less than seven unique books with the title, all published between 1838 and 1889 (*WorldCat First Search*, accessed April 14, 2017). Many of these texts also appear to be religiously oriented. Wolfson dismisses *Lays* (*Borderlines*, 106, 130), and Fryckstedt devotes only one paragraph of her two-article overview to *Lays*, calling it "mediocre, and sometimes trite" ("The Hidden Rill: I," 199). See also Singer, "Wordsworthian Vision," 535; and Gillett, *Maria Jane Jewsbury*, xlix.

The volume's title suggests a privileged space where a non-working woman can leisurely muse on imagination, poetry, and, in Jewsbury's case, on how to anchor those enthusiastic ideas in religious devotion. Jewsbury's implied audience stands between *Letters*' adolescent recipients and the adult readers of *The Three Histories*, who glean principles enthusiasm's consequences from fiction. *Lays* filters the didactic principles of *Letters* through poetry before applying them to *The History of an Enthusiast*'s Julia Osborne, making the text an important transitional moment in Jewsbury's career-defining quest to define and renovate female enthusiasm. Admittedly, *Lays* retains much of *Letters*' didacticism, and some of the verse is "mediocre,"[35] but Jewsbury's lyricized poetic theory stands readily (if silently in much recent criticism) alongside William Wordsworth's and P. B. Shelley's; moreover, her verse joins the poetry of Letitia Elizabeth Landon and Elizabeth Barrett Browning in gendering those contemplations. At the core of this volume, Jewsbury asks how women can reconcile the religious and secular notions of enthusiasm that inform their constructions of Romantic poetic identity.

This section reads Jewsbury's 1829 *Lays* as evidence of her sustained concern about regulating enthusiasm, and of her movement toward "enthusiast" as a label for women of genius. The word "enthusiasm" never appears in the volume, but Jewsbury's poems feature a range of enthusiast speakers under various related titles—poet, prophet, genius—and representing diverse experiences of inspiration. I propose that this shift from addressing enthusiasm as a concept in *Letters* to conceptualizing the enthusiast as a poetic speaker in *Lays* changes the way Jewsbury asks her readers to think about the topic. In losing the formal "instructress" tone of *Letters*, Jewsbury gains the open, questioning, ambiguous mode of a poet using her own medium to reflect on her vocation. Instead of speaking definitively from past experience, she speaks from the perspectives of enthusiasts attempting to define enthusiasm while in its throes. In these

[35] Gillett, *Maria Jane Jewsbury*, xlix.

poems, Jewsbury casts the poet as mantic but inescapably human, and she equivocates on the relative benefits and dangers of ambition. After tracing these ideas across the volume, I discuss the two poems that most closely prefigure *The History of an Enthusiast* by presuming that genius and happiness cannot coexist in a female character and, by extension, in the Romantic female poet. *Lays of Leisure Hours* represents Jewsbury's transition between epistolary prescriptivism and a more authentic fictional depiction of the female enthusiast. Religious poetry thus becomes an essential part of the formal and critical context for understanding Jewsbury's theory of the poet as enthusiast, and for her best-known heroine, Julia Osborne.

Lays' first poem, "Invocation to the Spirit of Poesy," exemplifies how the definition of "enthusiast" was expanding in the nineteenth century, as well as how *Lays* propelled Jewsbury's evolving conceptualization of enthusiasm in the 1820s. An intricately rhymed apostrophe in the vein of P. B. Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" (1817), Jewsbury's poem struggles to define the poet's relationship to the mysterious poetic spirit. Unlike Shelley's poem, however, Jewsbury's does confirm the Spirit's gender, and she organizes the poem around a set of feminine enthusiast synonyms: "Queen of all harmonious things, / Dancing words, and speaking strings," reads the epigraph from Abraham Cowley's *Pindarique Odes* (1656), a fifteen-poem collection that apes "the Latin poet's enthusiastic manner" through conceits and metrical irregularity.[36] "Enchantress" and "Friend" are but two of the other titles Jewsbury considers for the Spirit. More heavy-handed than Shelley's "Hymn," Jewsbury's list confronts the reader immediately: "SPIRIT, or Power, or Spell, or whatsoe'er / Of name beseems thee best, Ethereal Thing" (lines 1-2). Confounded in saying who or what the Spirit is, Jewsbury turns to what it does. In order to help the poet's soul harmonize with the inspired dreams that visit it, the Spirit

[36] "Abraham Cowley," in *Encyclopedia Britannica Online* (Encyclopedia Britannica: 2011), accessed December 18, 2017, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Abraham-Cowley.

"prompt[s]" inspiration by muting some frequencies and enhancing others (line 5), effectively cancelling out the noise of life so that the poet may access "[r]esplendent visions" and "soul-enchanting dreams" trapped within the subconscious (line 6). By figuring Poesy as arbiter and harmonizer of visions, Jewsbury implicitly figures the poet as a visionary enthusiast.

Jewsbury uses the enthusiast's relationship to "the Spirit of Poesy" to critique the poet's ambitions for earthly fame, and to offer a more capacious definition of enthusiasm that includes the consumer of poetry as well. Unlike Staël's emblematic Corinne and, later, Jewsbury's Julia, the speaker of this poem has received no poetic accolades: "Not mine the temples with thy laurel crown'd" (line 14).[37] Despite the Spirit's withholding of patronage, the speaker still feels "bound" to Poesy, and she has learned to worship it in a different way:

> Do not I love thee, though with small return?
> Do not I serve thee, though I once forebore?
> Do not I study, though I little learn
> Of thy harmonious wiles and stringed lore? (lines 16-20).

Instead of pitting personal ambition against religious devotion like she had in *Letters*, Jewsbury here offers a middle ground. As a self-proclaimed amateur poet, her speaker loves Poesy not "for [her] own rude singing" but for the "entranc[ing]" verses of "other bards" (lines 25-26). By delivering inspiration to her speaker by proxy, Jewsbury register's the expanding definition of "enthusiast" in the Romantic period. The early stanzas describe an enthusiast in the eighteenth-century sense of one who receives "inspiration, perfect, pure, and deep," from the "Enchantress," Poesy, but later stanzas describe a poetry enthusiast, an informed appreciator of Poesy's "light divine" (lines 46, 55-56).[38] Jewsbury's broader definition of "enthusiast" returns the agency to enthusiasm itself, making the "Spirit of Poesy" a "celestial stranger" with a prophetic "tongue of

[37] These lines may allude obliquely to the poor reception of Jewsbury's *Phantasmagoria*.

[38] See Chapter 1.

fire" and the "ever-burning lamp" of a Romantic poet (lines 41, 56). Jewsbury's changes in genre, audience, and mode mark important shifts in her *oeuvre* from practical advice to abstract poetic theory as she moves toward an embodied version of enthusiasm in *History*.

Jewsbury theorizes poetic enthusiasm across these changing historical valences by taking advantage of poetry's capacity for ambiguity and paradox. Whereas *Letters* demanded a singular, authoritative standpoint on the subject, *Lays* imagines multiple different enthusiastic speakers and auditors, along with their sometimes-contradictory perspectives about their own art. Her "Poetical Portraits" exemplify this approach most clearly. Like Landon's gallery in *The Improvisatrice*, Jewsbury's portraits allow her to figure enthusiastic qualities paradoxically, as "gifts of love and grief" ("Poetical Portraits," III, line 6). Portrait III characterizes enthusiasm as both "dark" and "bright," in effect disrupting any simple value judgment (line 4); moreover, Jewsbury's metaphors in Portraits III and IV, especially, imply that enthusiasm is both natural and supernatural, and that the enthusiast can function as both agent and conduit. Portrait III vacillates between "spells of mind and power" and the "spirit's storm" (lines 13, 10). Like the spells of Landon's Hindoo Girl, Jewsbury's are conscious, scripted intonations that seek some kind of power through words, but the shift to powerful nature suggests a loss of control, a state not of acting but of being acted upon. Similarly, Portrait IV attributes to the enthusiast auditor both "wizard power"—complete with "charms," "visions strange," and a "magic scroll"—and intimately connected with the sublime Nature (lines 1, 15, 5, 6).[39] As we have seen in examples from Landon and Shelley, the female enthusiast fascinated Romantic-era writers and readers precisely because she collected competing models of inspiration, agency, and even submission.

Jewsbury's Portraits reify this capacious Romantic enthusiasm by acknowledging both its receptive and its expressive or visionary forms. In Portrait IV, Jewsbury separates the two by

[39] See also the "Visions of delight" in line 14.

distinguishing auditor from speaker. The emblems of enthusiasm appear, rather conventionally, in the auditor's eyes, which infuse the receptive speaker with new power. "I have caught the light all from thine eyes and thee," says the speaker of her "queen," but in doing so she reveals her own "powers of sight": "Oh why didst thou waken / This new power in me!" (lines 10, 20, 15, 26-27). With these "powers of sight," the enthusiasts of others lays experience terrestrial and heavenly visions. The clearest example is the aptly titled "Earth and Heaven," a poem anchored by two questions: "What seest thou on Earth?" and "What seest thou in Heaven?" (lines 8, 40). In response to the first, the Sun describes human existence in physicalized, enthusiastic terms: "lips breathing," "hands wreathing," and "brows burning" (lines 9, 11, 13). In the second, it privileges that embodied, human soul over celestial bodies:

> More bright and immortal
> Than sun, or than star,
> SOUL, look from thy portal,
> What seest thou afar? (lines 33-36)

Jewsbury's versifying is lackluster in these lines, but they show the power she grants to visionary enthusiasm. The Soul does not have a different vista, but instead views earth and mortality with immortal eyes "given," presumably, by God (line 38). As in *Letters to the Young*, enthusiasm represents God-given insight into matters human and divine. With this special receptivity comes the enthusiast's sense of responsibility in expression, a responsibility that Jewsbury struggles to reconcile with personal ambitions in *Letters*, *Lays*, and *History of an Enthusiast.*

Jewsbury's conceptual shift from generalized "enthusiasm" in *Letters* to the embodied "enthusiasts" of *Lays* relies on this motif of embodiment; moreover, Jewsbury explores what happens when the visionary soul gains a human identity that carries significant cultural baggage. In "Dreams of Heaven," she narrowly distinguishes two enthusiast identities with very long religious and literary histories. The poem defines "seer" as one "to whom God hath shown the

truth," and a "rapt prophet" uses his "blissful eye" to access "unsealed vision[s]" of divine truths, and even to behold the face of God (lines 25, 29, 103-4, 108). Both experience "powerful sight," to borrow Jewsbury's term from Portrait IV, but their relationships to truth reveal varying degrees of agency. The seer has been "shown" truth, but the prophet looks up on it in God's visage. Even mentioning the prophet's eyes locates the visionary power in the physical body, rather than wholly in an external source. These kinds of subtle differences make *Lays* a crucial step toward Jewsbury's later condensing of enthusiastic powers in *History*. As she experiments with enthusiastic embodiment in her 1829 verse, Jewsbury finds compelling voices through to reflexively examine the enthusiast's relationships with divine power, personal ambition, and secular fame. To conclude my reading of *Lays*, I will discuss two such introspective poems: "To My Own Heart," where a prophet addresses his or her own enthusiastic faculties in religious terms; and "The Glory of the Heights," a lay that presumes the impossibility of such genius—religious or secular—ever co-existing with happiness. These poems reveal enthusiasm's centrality for Jewsbury as an evangelical convert, an advisor to youthful genius, and an enthusiast herself.

In "To My Own Heart," Jewsbury isolates enthusiasm by separating the poem's speaker from her prophetic "Spirit"; then, she uses the Spirit's monologue to help the speaker come to terms with her enthusiast identity. In essence, a woman learns of her enthusiasm from her own mantic spirit rather than from an outside advisor, as in *Letters*. As this poem's title suggests, the speaker addresses her own "heart," but she at first conflates it with "mind" and "Spirit" (lines 3, 34). She requests a conversation with her own "allotted part / Of immortality," i.e. her "own deep heart," which Jewsbury treats in this poem as a voiced entity capable of its own revelations (lines 12-13). But the heart's "thoughts and secrets," like many biblical prophecies, are sealed with

unspecified dates of opening (line 14). Jewsbury affirms that the heart's inner workings are "deep and hidden now" but proclaims they will be "soon unsealed," echoing distinctions that emerge between the revelations of Old and New Testament prophets (line 12). In Daniel 12, God commands Daniel to "shut up the words, and seal the book, *even* to the time of the end." Daniel has special knowledge, but the book is "closed up and sealed" indefinitely.[40] By contrast, God commands the John to leave Revelation unsealed: "Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand."[41] So, when Jewsbury describes her speakers her locked inner thoughts as soon to be "unsealed," she elevates them to prophetic importance and anticipates that the Spirit's "judgment-voice" will "yield" life-changing mysteries (line 18). The distinct Spirit holds clear enthusiastic power, even before readers are sure whether the speaker possesses it.

Like Landon, Jewsbury often uses apostrophe to signal passages of enthusiastic import, but in this poem she reverses the usual dynamic to introduce the long-anticipated revelation of the speaker's inner self. With a force like that of Landon's Prophetess, she commands:

> "Spirit within me, speak," and through the veil
> That hides thee from my vision, tell thy tale;
> That so the present and the past may be
> Guardians and prophets to futurity. (lines 34-37)

Rather than calling to ethereal beings outside herself, she commands the "Spirit within," which she anthropomorphizes in keeping with Jewsbury's frequent physicalizing of enthusiasm. The entity begins to assume attributes of human beings and, more importantly, of the Holy Spirit. This Spirit's presence can be hidden from the speaker, making its voice the speaker's pipeline to inner thought. "[T]hou art not dumb," Jewsbury clarifies, acknowledging the Spirit's power of speech before emphasizing its "voice" (lines 38-40). This voice has the power to penetrate the

[40] Daniel 12: 4, 9, King James Version; italics original to translation.

[41] Revelation 22:10, King James Version.

"veil," which represents the divide between spiritual and physical, but also to disrupt linear time, by merging "the present and the past" (36). Interestingly, the speaker is the not the prophet: instead, her past thoughts are, and this fact is reiterated by the nature of her command: "Thus speak, with memories and musings fraught" (line 41). The speaker accesses past and present thoughts by uncoupling the Spirit from her own consciousness and physical body. Once she creates a separate entity of her heart, she relies on its prophetic voice to guide her future steps.

With the Spirit's quoted response, Jewsbury's poem transforms from apostrophe into dialogue, and then into an extended diagnosis of enthusiasm. "Mortal, Immortal,"[42] the Spirit calls, addressing Jewsbury's initial speaker in terms that affirm but also complicate the separation between body and soul in this poem. As the extracted representative of her "own heart," the Spirit knows the speaker intimately, and this knowledge becomes painfully clear when it labels her with a term she seems unable to call herself: "enthusiast" (line 44). Unflattering yet affectionate, the assignation of this label recognizes the speaker's progress toward self-knowledge and regulation. The Spirit wishes these principles had "claimed [her] prime" as well, but a different temperament ruled the day in her youth:

> within thee burned th' enthusiast's fire,
> Wild love of freedom, longings for the lyre;—
> And ardent visions of romantic youth,
> Too fair for time, and oh! too frail for truth!
> Aspirings nurst by solitude and pride,
> Worlds to the dreamer, dreams to all beside;
> Bright vague imaginings of bliss to be,
> None ever saw, yet none despaired to see,
> And aimless energies that bade the mind
> Launch like a ship and leave the world behind.
> But duty disregarded, reason spurned,
> Knowledge despised, and wisdom all unlearned,
> Punish the rebel who refused to bow,
> And stamped SELF-TORTURER on th' enthusiast's brow. (lines 42-57)

[42] This address anticipates the title of Mary Shelley's short story, "The Mortal, Immortal: A Tale" (1833).

I quote this passage in full to illustrate how the "enthusiast" identity bookends Jewsbury's description of youthful character. In doing so, it helps form a definition of enthusiasm in this poem and in Jewsbury's *oeuvre* more broadly. The Spirit's overwhelming list of enthusiastic symptoms combines hallmark events like "visions" and "dreams" with adjectives used to undermine the female enthusiast's authority: "wild," "ardent," "vague," "aimless." Frequent caesurae disrupt the rhythm of otherwise regular heroic couplets, reflecting through frenzied verse the negative stereotypes of political and poetic fervor that inform Jewsbury's definition. The "enthusiast's fire" burns from a "[w]ild love of freedom" not unlike that of Mary Shelley's Euthanasia, but in this case her "ardent" longings are for the "lyre," not for political power.[43] The Spirit explicitly characterizes enthusiastic ambitions as poetic, secular, and fame-oriented, much like those of the addressees in Jewsbury's *Letters*; moreover, the Spirit's implication that enthusiasm is "fair" and "frail" plays on the derogatory feminization of the term in eighteenth-century religious discourse. Jewsbury's Spirit interlocutor undermines the enthusiast by characterizing her ambitions as flighty, secular, and insufficiently serious for the weightier "truth" of prophetic inspiration.

Once the Spirit has defined the enthusiast via recognizable tropes, it casts her enthusiasm as selfish, misguided, unreasonable, and even masochistic. Unlike Landon, who imagines the Improvisatrice, Erinna, and the Prophetess as powerful figures who experience romantic and social drawbacks, Jewsbury imagines the young enthusiast as virtually useless. The critique of lines 46-55 reads like a versified passage from *Letters*, and perhaps offers an even more dire view. With the claim that "none despaired to see" the speaker's imaginings, Jewsbury forecloses the possibility of social value in the speaker's visions and dreams. These inadequacies are compounded by sins of omission: the speaker had rejected "duty," "reason," "[k]nowledge," and

[43] See Shelley, *Valperga*, 81, 19; and Chapter 2.

"wisdom," effectively rebelling against educational standards endorsed in both religious and secular circles to prevent uncontrolled passion. When considered alongside Letters XVI and XVIII, this poem's warnings against enthusiastic self-importance reflect Jewsbury's tendency to view enthusiasm as an adolescent phase. Like the sage advisor of *Letters*, the speaker of "To My Own Heart" assesses the damage of youthful enthusiasm in terms of her own experience but recasts it from an externalized, objective, and therefore more authoritative perspective

In this mode of detached, retrospective disclosure, the Spirit indicates that the enthusiast-speaker's conversion was not as complete as she had hoped, implying that enthusiasm is a deep-seated characteristic that requires persistent regulation. Duty, Reason, Knowledge, and Wisdom do not appreciate being scorned, so they "[p]unish the rebel" by branding "SELF-TORTURER on th' enthusiast's brow." As in *Valperga*, the materializing of labels solidifies the enthusiast's self-perception. Recall how Beatrice of Ferrara's "riband" affixes to her brow a plate that announces her prophetess role.[44] That Beatrice gives herself the label "Ancilla Dei" ("Handmaiden of God") shows pride in her enthusiasm and in the attention it brings. Jewsbury's enthusiast-speaker has a totally different relationship to the words emblazoned on her brow. Her label has been imposed on her; moreover, instead of describing her relation to a deity, it characterizes her relation to herself. "SELF-TORTURER" connotes shameful masochism rather than special prophecy, and the "stamp[ing]" on her forehead suggests more force and more permanence than Beatrice's plate. Like a branded criminal, the enthusiast has been judged by another (in this case her own Spirit) and marked permanently as a reminder to herself how her rebellious past informs her conflicted present. At the same time, the passage's equating of "enthusiast" with "self-torturer" seems to describe a type, not an individual. Jewsbury universalizes again in her answer to that recurring

[44] Shelley, *Valperga*, 129, 136; Stuart Curran, "*Valperga*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*, ed. Esther Schor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 112; and Chapter 2.

question: Can the female enthusiast be happy? "No earthly happiness exists for such," responds the Spirit (line 58). Rather than suggesting religious application, the Spirit rejects happiness for the enthusiast because she "disdain[s]" her fellow mortals. "Self" is her "sole object, interest, aim, end, view," and she is "ever mourning fancied joys o'erthrown" because she has not a "single grief to own" (lines 62-66). This idea of "fancied joys" invokes stereotypes of the poetess as featured in 1820s and 1830s periodicals, and as exemplified in Landon's monologues. The lovelorn woman sickens melodramatically under the influence of feverish enthusiasm. As the Spirit quips, "A breath can raise them, but a breath can kill" (line 60). In other words, if inspiring breath can fan these enthusiasts into a powerful flame, it can just as easily snuff them out.

Unlike Shelley and Landon, however, Jewsbury offers her enthusiast a third option: the slow, steady flame of moderation. When the Spirit concludes its enthusiast definition with the reminder "And such wert thou," it also acknowledges the temporal distance between the first speaker's youthful ambition and her current state of mature reflection. The end of "To My Own Heart" merges the two voices again when the speaker comes to view her own past in terms of the enthusiast's inspiration and effusion: "Too oft forebodings agonize the soul, / As lamentation filled the prophet's roll" (lines 80-81). While the penitent speaker scarcely claims prophetic ability, she does align her experience with the sorrowful prophet's, and indeed, her vision sharpens by the poem's end. If we read this final reflection as reintegrating enthusiast and Spirit, her clear (if "troubled") eye makes sense (line 79). No longer rebelling against her Spirit, she attains self-knowledge and, along with it, "a calmer mood, a brighter view" (line 83). In general, argues Jewsbury, the "opprest" enthusiast "may learn" to be "cheerful," to be helpful, and "to point his spirit's inward sight, / To orbs for ever fixed, for ever bright" (lines 85, 87, 96-97). Like Jewsbury's speaker (and Jewsbury herself, if we credit her conversion narrative), the enthusiast

can learn to contemplate her own spirit as a distinctive power, and to regulate and channel that power toward eternal matters rather than following fancy's whims.[45] Jewsbury's understanding of enthusiast identity in this poem may not allow for happiness, but it does offer the possibility that self-knowledge can prevents the tragic end that seemed inevitable in Shelley's *Valperga* and in Landon's 1820s monologues.

Jewsbury meditates more extensively on the dismal prospects for uniting enthusiasm and happiness in "The Glory of the Heights." The poem's disquisition on the "mockery" of fame reflects earlier concerns with secular ambition in *Letters* and prefigures Julia Osborne's ill-fated obsession with literary renown in *The History of an Enthusiast* (line 1). As in *Letters* and *History*, the rounded, semi-autobiographical speaker of "Glory" cannot seem to decide whether to admire or abjure her enthusiast status. An important difference here is that the enthusiast's indecision occurs within the space of six short stanzas rather than appearing in discrete letters or developing over the course of an entire novella. By compressing the speaker's vacillations in this way, Jewsbury suggests that conflictedness about one's abilities is an essential part of enthusiast identity. In "Glory," the enthusiast-speaker tentatively praises the lofty, God-given powers of poetry even while acceding to social critiques of feminine genius. She distinguishes these perspectives with two different senses of "glory": in the epigraph, Stanza I, and again in Stanza V, Jewsbury makes glory nearly synonymous with fame, which she represents as deadly to happiness; in Stanzas 2-4 and Stanza 6, however, Jewsbury questions this conclusion by using Nature's "glory" as a metaphor for the accomplishments of poetic enthusiasm. The back-and-forth jars the reader, but the continuity provided by Jewsbury's "glory" motif reinforces the sense that these perspectives' coexistence is central to enthusiast identity.

[45] For fancy in *Lays*, see also "To a Village Church" (pp. 101-4) and "Fancy and Philosophy" (pp. 138-41).

The initial pessimistic movement of "Glory" pairs a cheeky Miltonic critique of fame with a more dire assessment in the voice of Jewsbury's lyric speaker. The epigraph from John Milton's *Lycidas* (c. 1637) casts Fame as "the spur that the clear spirit doth raise, / (That last infirmity of the Noble mind) / To scorn delights, and live laborious dayes."[46] Fame represents a sort of spiritual masochism—a pain self-inflicted by a spirit otherwise "clear" of impediments to delight—but also a mental "infirmity." Interestingly, Jewsbury elides the parenthetical excuse Milton provides in line 71, rendering the spirit's choice of "laborious dayes" over "delights" as one made with full command of working faculties. This edit sets up Jewsbury's judgmental opening lines in "Glory": "O MOCKERY to dream of genius wed / To quiet happiness!" (lines 1-2). Instead of playfully chastising an inform mind for giving itself more work than necessary, Jewsbury's speaker derides the competent spirit for thinking it could achieve such an unlikely marriage. But trying to unite genius and happiness is more than inadvisable; it is impossible, except in a dream world. Jewsbury figures this pessimism through a series of natural metaphors. While "the vale" dons sunny garb, "the bold mountains towering overhead / Must robe in mist and cloud" and "[b]e girt with stormy shroud" (lines 4-6). The vale (happiness) and the mountains (genius) are jarringly ill-matched—one seems dressed for a wedding in its "garment" of "sunlight," the other for a funeral with its grave clothes (line 3). Even when the mountains dress "awhile in partial verdure," they still "hide unmelted snows for ever in their breast" (lines 7-8). Jewsbury's speaker thus highlights the inherent falseness—or "MOCKERY"—of representing a union of two natures so diametrically opposed. She mocks her own belief in companionate genius and happiness, but her secondary target is the poetry itself. The metaphor of shadowy

[46] John Milton, *Lycidas*, *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes, 116-25 (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1957, rpt. 2003), lines 70-72.

nature redressed in bridal clothes mocks the reader who believes in the marriage, but it also mocks the enthusiast whose poem attempts to retain "delight" in the face of "laborious dayes."

Jewsbury retreats from this mocking tone—if not its unhappy implications—in Stanzas II-IV, where images of Romantic sublimity to glorify genius apart from its relationship to happiness. Anaphoric "Yet" phrases register the speaker's resistance to the negative declarations she made at the poem's outset. "Yet have the mountains glory," begins Stanza III, which touts the jagged heights' beauty by emphasizing their roughness, turbulence, and fire (line 17). The mountains' cragginess translates to sublimity, not unsightliness: "as with jewels strewn, / Cavern and crag unhewn, / Glow with the varied and effulgent hues" (lines 13-15). Here, the sunlight appears less as a temporary, ill-fitted garment than as a spotlight on the cavern's precious stones. But even when the sun hides behind storm clouds, argues Jewsbury, the mountains' glory still shows in the powerful "storm" that "throws / Its kindling power around" (lines 28-29). With the help of the storm, "passive things rebound," and "weaker elements arise, and share / The lofty strife, that else they might not dare" (lines 30-32). In other words, genius glories in ruggedness and in activity, and by doing so it elevates those who weather its powerful storm. Jewsbury's second movement ameliorates genius, not by creating a false hope of its union with happiness, but by delineating the glories it achieves by that very act of residing above the quotidian.

Jewsbury reprises her skepticism in the poem's final movement by focusing less on the heights' glory than their unreachable altitude, and by pleading with the lofty enthusiast to accept the impossibility of bridging the distance between mountain and vale. In Stanza V, for instance, Jewsbury's speaker addresses Genius directly, and with a new name: "Promethean Power," she calls out, "Survey, and be content thy state and dower" (lines 34-35). As in *Letters*, Jewsbury seems to admire Promethean creativity while lamenting its consequences. She exhorts genius to

remain in its station, to be satisfied with an immortal name among the "countless generations" it precedes and outlives rather than pining for an impossible happiness (line 37). But the first line of Stanza VI—"Yet, art thou sad Magician?"—indicates that this powerful yet melancholy entity defies the speaker's request. The clouds and cooler temperatures of these lines, along with the mountain and storm metaphors of earlier stanzas, suggest that genius resides between heaven and earth. Genius has become "wear[y]" of its "charmed" existence between the earthly and the divine, and wants to join one of the two (lines 41, 44). So, Jewsbury's speaker helps ease the decision: "Look from thy cloudy throne; / Heed not thy chilling zone; / To Heaven aspire" (lines 45-47). Since the enthusiast resides closer to divinity than to humanity, the lonely genius's "soul shall fail / To blend with mountain-power the quiet of the vale!" (lines 47-48). Much as she did in "To My Own Heart," Jewsbury offers a productive, alternative end for the enthusiast. By confirming genius's incompatibility with happiness, she paradoxically allows the enthusiast to find contentment through her loftiness. In fact, elevation is the crux of the poem: enthusiasm cannot coexist with quiet happiness because it exists on a more sublime plane.

Jewsbury's frequent invocation of genius in *Lays* helps establish enthusiasm as a major theme for the volume, but perhaps more telling is her fickleness in treating that theme. Her poetic speakers comingle pride and shame, and her lyricism creates reflective moments that hold both those feelings in tension. For example, the dreamer of "A Summer Eve's Vision" views ambition and fame in a "sublime" plane but holds grave misconceptions about what that higher existence will entail (line 22). She "vainly" predicts "bright bowers" but instead finds "a darker mood" and "barren" heights devoid of sunshine (lines 26-27, 29, 31). "The Exile's Heart" exposes a similar disconnect between expectation and reality by showing how "the poet's dream / Is oft a dream divine," but reminding readers that divinity exiles the dreamer from human affection without

alleviating her "longings" for it (lines 19-20, 23). The "exile's heart" in these poems represents an enthusiast rife with conflict and contradiction. As such, it prefigures the most famous exile of Jewsbury's *oeuvre*: *History*'s Julia Osborne. Whereas *Letters* implied Jewsbury's conflictedness by fashioning her as a reformed enthusiast, *Lays* re-infuses her discourse on enthusiasm with the ambition, melancholy, and doubts of her pre-conversion voice. She carries that voice into *History*, where it rings proudly from Julia's lips but is often qualified by a narrator who cautiously sympathizes with the female enthusiast. This narrative voice—arguably the most interesting formal aspect of Jewsbury's novella—begins in her earlier religious works. Its principles stem from *Letters to the Young*, its poetic ambivalence from *Lays of Leisure Hours*, and its conflict from a woman writer who struggled for years to disentangle the religious piety and literary ambition that formed her enthusiastic identity.

III. *The History of an Enthusiast* (1830)

While Jewsbury's 1820s poetry and prose helped to establish her as "a successful woman writer," she was not, as Diego Saglia contends, "at ease in the intellectual world and literary market of early nineteenth-century England."[47] During this period, and indeed until her death in 1833, Jewsbury consistently expressed unease at the demands that marketplace placed on women, and frustration at the limitations it placed on women's enthusiasm. Although not quite the didactic bridles that some critics have described, *Letters* and *Lays* encourage religious self-regulation as a means for channeling enthusiastic tendencies. For Jewsbury, this struggle to regulate genius was more than advice for children or material for polite verse. In an 1829 letter to Dora Wordsworth, Jewsbury admits she "cannot conceive how, unless a necessity be laid upon her, any woman of acute sensibility, and refined imagination can brook the fever strife of

[47] Diego Saglia, "Other Homes: Exoticism and Domesticity in Maria Jane Jewsbury's *Oceanides*," *Women's Writing* 12.2 (2005): 206.

authorship."[48] "Acute" and "refined" both invoke cultivation and regulation, but "brook" is an especially curious word in this context. Given most contemporaneous definitions, Jewsbury seems to argue that Romantic women of genius "endure[d]" authorship as "fever strife," as the same enthusiastic sickness borne by their foremothers;[49] however, from its Old English origins through the late nineteenth century, "brook" also meant "[t]o enjoy the use of, make use of, profit by; to use, enjoy, possess, hold."[50] As Jewsbury's 1820s writing demonstrates, she held these two ideas in tension: she wondered whether women could tolerate enthusiasm, but she also mused on the possibilities for using it to fulfill their own literary ambitions. At this crucial moment in Jewsbury's career, she expresses conception's challenge, not its impossibility. She was, after all, at the very time of this letter, conceiving of a fictional woman who would brook, in both senses, her enthusiastic fever.

Jewsbury's *History* asks what is possible—and what is inescapable—for the female enthusiast. Her novella frames these questions in terms of Romantic-era gender norms, religious doctrines, and changing generic conventions, but in reading *History*, many critics "fasten" to Jewsbury and her heroine the gender assumptions of their own times.[51] For 1930s biographer Eric Gillett, Jewsbury's exercise in self-portraiture taught her "she did not really want a worldly

[48] Maria Jane Jewsbury to Dora Wordsworth, January 20, 1829, qtd. in Gillett, li; Wolfson, "Romanticism & Gender & Melancholy," 448. This letter also contains Jewsbury's frequently quoted (if perhaps misleading) statement about *Lays of Leisure Hours*: "I only write verse to improve my prose" (see Wolfson, "Romanticism & Gender & Melancholy," 448).

[49] See Wolfson, "Romanticism & Gender & Melancholy," 449.

[50] "brook, v.1," *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), accessed April 08, 2017, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/23753?rskey=1IJ9mH&result=3. Literature often played on the word's archaic roots. For instance, Walter Scott revives an optimistic sense of "brook" in *The Fair Maid of Perth* (*OED*).

[51] From Jewsbury's journal, qtd. in Gillett, *Maria Jane Jewsbury*, lxv. For other autobiographical readings, see Fryckstedt, "The Hidden Rill: II," 452; Clarke, 86; Ellen Peel and Nanora Sweet, "*Corinne* and the Woman as Poet in England: Hemans, Jewsbury, and Barrett Browning," in *The Novel's Seductions: Staël's* Corinne *in Critical Inquiry*, ed. Karyna Szmurlo (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1999), 211; and Low, *Literary Protégées*, 164.

or intellectual life. Her strongest desire was for everyday happiness with a man."[52] When second-wave feminist critics recovered Jewsbury, they rejected Gillett's claim, and *History* became the outcry of a frustrated woman genius without "the same outlets for her mental powers as men."[53] As such, Julia Osborne perpetuates the Corinne mythos, but Susan Wolfson and Kari Lokke have recently shown how Jewsbury satirizes and parodies *Corinne* to interrogate possibilities for the woman of genius rather than pathologizing female artistic melancholy.[54] In what follows, I extend these claims by show how *History*'s most compelling arguments emerge from Jewsbury's earlier religious works, *Letters to the Young* and *Lays of Leisure Hours*, and how these texts inform the larger development of Jewsbury's theory of female enthusiasm. As one reviewer puts it, in *History* Jewsbury "accomplishes by stratagem, what, in her Letters, she aims at more openly . . . . while assuming a gayer dress, never lays aside the character of the instructress."[55] Jewsbury combines the "instructress" mode of *Letters* with the reflective lyricism of *Lays* to create a realistic enthusiast character that tests these advice and doubts in fictional scenarios.

Jewsbury's concern for children and adolescents with enthusiastic tendencies emerges as a common theme in *Letters* and *History*, where adult voices cast genius as poison or affliction, both for the enthusiast and for his or her family. *Letters* maintains a single advising persona—presumably that of Jewsbury herself—that employs extended metaphors and personal experience to authoritatively discuss the "salutary check" or "mental remedy" of regulation (*Letters*, 5, 119).

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[52] Gillett, *Maria Jane Jewsbury*, xiv, lvii-lviii.

[53] Fryckstedt, "The Hidden Rill: II," 457. See also Clarke, *Ambitious Heights*, 37, 56.

[54] Wolfson, *Borderlines*, 106; Wolfson, "Romanticism & Gender & Melancholy," 449; and Kari Lokke, "British Legacies of *Corinne* and the Commercialization of Enthusiasm," in *Staël's Philosophy of the Passions: Sensibility, Society, and the Sister Arts*, ed. Tili Boon Cuillé and Karyna Szmurlo (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2013), 171-90.For echoes of *Corinne*, see Fryckstedt, "The Hidden Rill: II," 451-60; Clarke, *Ambitious Heights*, 83; Peel and Sweet, "*Corinne* and the Woman as Poet in England," 211-15; and Low, *Literary Protégées*, 164. For deviations from the Corinne mythos, see Clarke, *Ambitious Heights*, 84, 86; Wilkes, "'Without Impropriety,'" 34; and Wilkes, *Women Reviewing Women*, 28.

[55] "*The Three Histories*," *The Eclectic Review*, 350.

In *History*, though, Jewsbury diffuses adult caution, creating avatars with varying degrees of authority and rationality. In Julia's grandmother, Mrs. Carhampton, we find a "dread of genius" that stems from the loss of her daughter and grows to full-blown moral hypochondria in fear for her granddaughter: "She had the same horror of genius that she would have had of an infectious disorder; in her estimation it was the small-pox of the soul."[56] Since small pox was dangerous but preventable in the nineteenth century, Jewsbury's metaphor figures enthusiasm as perilous but not necessarily fatal. Mrs. Carhampton attempts to keep Julia away from books, which she views as the repositories of dangerous knowledge (17). Perhaps she acts in her own defense as well as Julia's. Later, once Julia has sought literary genius, Mrs. Carhampton continues to lament "the affliction of genius" that affects her as the only remaining family of the young enthusiast. Less dire is the view of Mr. Mortimer, the father of Julia's friend Annette. He recognizes Julia as "'a born genius'" and expresses wonder: "'*what* genius is I don't pretend to define, or even to know; whether it be a natural inspiration, a faculty, or the mere application of faculty in general, I know not; but be it what it may in the way of ability, Julia has it'" (20, emphasis original). But soon even Mr. Mortimer begins to fear for Julia. When she chooses literary fame over marriage, he warns her against the "laurel'": "'remember, from its leaf poison is distilled'" (25). Even Mr. Mortimer's more nuanced perspective reveals uneasiness about Julia's enthusiasm: he cannot understand it, but he still links it with death. Among adult characters, only Mr. Percy avoids jumping to this conclusion. A "proud and high-spirited" man himself (34), Mr. Percy views Julia's "mental powers" less as "'poisonous plants to be eradicated" than as "wild" vegetation that simply needs "'to be cultivated'" (37). Mr. Percy's more moderate view of enthusiasm sees

[56] Maria Jane Jewsbury, *The History of an Enthusiast*, in *The Three Histories* (London: Frederick Westley and A. H. Davis, 1830), 16, 17; hereafter cited parenthetically as *History*.

possibility rather than pathology. Like the adviser of *Letters*, he is more interested in remedies than in maladies because he is able to sympathize from personal experience.

Both Mr. Percy and Mr. Mortimer's plant metaphors include cultivation, a common prescription offered across Jewsbury's *oeuvre*—and in many other Romantic-period texts—to young people with enthusiastic tendencies. In *History*, as in *Letters*, Jewsbury maintains that enthusiasm is a God-given, natural ability in need of pruning and training. Since Julia "'has real genius,'" as Mr. Mortimer puts it, her "'mind should be richly, carefully, and strictly cultivated" (*History*, 21). He and Mrs. Carhampton agree vaguely that Julia should "have an excellent education," but Mr. Percy sketches a more specific plan for her training (11). "[A]ware that extraordinary powers at once of intellect and passion, were germinating in the mind of Julia," Mr. Percy knows that such a complex plant needs "fitting nutriment," expanding his botanical metaphor to include himself as gardener like the caretaking Jewsbury of *Letters* (46). Also like Jewsbury's *Letters* persona, Mr. Percy assumes a parental role. "Had his young friend been his own daughter," he muses,

> [H]e would in a private sphere, and with the modifications rendered necessary by her sex, have given her the education of a boy. . . . he thought it advisable to imbue her mind, in some measure, with classical knowledge, at once to give a definite object of pursuit, and by an acquaintance with the (intellectually) faultless models of antiquity, strengthen the understanding, and induce distrust of its own perfections. (*History*, 46-47)

The idea of giving a daughter a classical education recalls Euthanasia's father teaching her Dante and Petrarch in Shelley's *Valperga*, a practice likely borrowed from Mary Wollstonecraft's co-educational curriculum. Evangelical writer Hannah More also advocated a classical education, having received it herself.[57] Jewsbury, too, views "classical knowledge" as a way to expand the woman's mind, and *History* offers religion as one possible corrective of female enthusiasm. Mr.

[57] See Shelley, *Valperga*, 70-71; and Chapter 2. For Hannah More's classical education, see S. J. Skedd, "More, Hannah (1745-1833), in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2014), accessed February 12, 2018; https://doi-org.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/10.1093/ref:odnb/19179.

Percy thinks that, "if in their wild state the passions must be considered the pagans of the soul, it was yet quite possible to baptize them into christianity [*sic*]" (46-47). As in *Valperga*, the wild, heretical enthusiast needs converting. As in *Letters*, Jewsbury's Evangelical Protestantism helps regulate enthusiasm; however, Jewsbury's approach to regulation becomes more ecumenical as the novella continues. Even when she no longer professes Christianity, Julia still "possesse[s] that strong sense of duty which answered the moral purpose of a hedge of thorns; it kept her proud, daring, enthusiastic spirit within bounds, and made her timid of wounding her conscience" (113). While still promoting religious intervention via Mrs. Carhampton and Mr. Percy, Jewsbury entertains regulatory approaches based on secular morality. Julia seeks to bind her own spirit through irreligious means, and *History*'s narrator allows her that chance.

Self-regulation proves more difficult than Julia imagines because of the physical, mental, and spiritual intricacies of enthusiasm as Jewsbury conceives of it in *History*. Even as a child, Julia's restless enthusiasm merges physical with metaphysical character. With her "'soft, dark, earnest, spiritual eyes,'" Julia "seems to acquire by intuition, to think, speak, and feel full of the spirit of the south, full of ardour and intelligence" (21-22). Like Shelley, Jewsbury locates in her heroine's eyes an ardent enthusiasm that is both perceptive and expressive. Julia "acquire[s]," but she also "speaks." As Lokke notes, this picture of young Julia casts her as more continental than English, borrowing from Corinne's Italianness and Staël's Frenchness.[58] These forms of enthusiasm share zealous "energy," "[t]hirst for knowledge," and supernatural powers of perception (*History*, 47, 18, 48). As Julia learns from books and experience, she relies on her "true interpreter within—Genius" (48); however, Jewsbury's narrator characterizes Julia's adult enthusiasm more as "power" than as raw ability: "the spirit that actuated her as a child was now in stronger, and more concentrated, if also in more silent operation" (18). "Energy" is "her

[58] Lokke, "British Legacies of *Corinne*," 182.

leading characteristic"; it raises her enthusiasm to a fever pitch and trains her efforts on literary fame (120). But if this energetic genius invigorates young Julia, the concentration of its power places "her imagination . . . in a constant state of attrition" that leads to restlessness (19). *History* thus applies the warnings of *Letters* and the doubts of *Lays* to a fictional enthusiast, following her from a precocious childhood through a challenging adulthood. By fictionalizing Jewsbury's earlier dictums and musings on enthusiasm, *History* achieves a more ambivalent—and therefore more compelling—picture of female genius. It improves on *Letters*' didacticism by teaching through a rounded, sympathetic example rather than a flattened cautionary heroine. Then, it uses this example to validate and explore the concerns of Jewsbury's enthusiastic speakers in *Lays*.

In *History*, Julia's *Künstlerroman* shows rather than tells readers about the importance of understanding and managing enthusiastic abilities. As a child, Julia's "restless, questioning, dreaming power" lends everything around her "absolute vitality" (*History*, 18). It "excited high but unutterable longings after lovely but unimaginable things," veiling her perceptions—and the internal power that enables them—in mystery that persists well into adulthood (18). Julia cannot speak her longings, cannot concretely imagine possibilities, and cannot discern the world of her mind from the world outside. As Mr. Mortimer assesses, fifteen-year-old Julia "knows little of herself, and nothing of the world"; as Mr. Percy observes later, adult Julia has still not acquired "self-knowledge," and its dearth has led her into "temporary dissipation" (26, 98). Jewsbury's heroine tips on the precipice that divides Euthanasia and Beatrice in *Valperga*. Education could have expanded her worldview, but without it she "mingled the pursuits of literature with the gaieties of fashion, [and] the change absolutely intoxicated her intellect" (114). Like Shelley's Beatrice and Landon's Improvisatrice, Julia becomes drunk with public approbation and loses the ability to discern reality from imagination: "She regarded every incident, person, place, and

thing, through the medium of her imagination," obscuring the "brilliant perils" of the enthusiast life (114, 15). These attractions are "the more brilliant and the more perilous because her own energy was the only oracle she ever consulted" (115). Privileged to freely enjoy enthusiasm in childhood and follow it into a successful career, Julia has never examined its directing force, so she does not anticipate its capacity for misdirection in other areas of life. Much like Beatrice and the Improvisatrice, Julia credits as inspiration the flawed impulses of human desire. She readily internalizes and follows the advice of Mrs. Lawrence Hervey, consuming novelties until they "at length grew old" and "revealed . . . death" behind nature's enchanting "veil" (123-24). *History* plays out the downfall Jewsbury warns against in *Letters* and fears in *Lays*. With Julia, a heroine who becomes "rather restless than ardent" as she ages (123), Jewsbury argues that childhood enthusiasm can be replaced with adult *ennui* if not regulated into some productive endeavor.

History also provides Jewsbury with a fictional space to test her theory that enthusiast identity resists conventional social models of womanhood. The impossible marriage of "genius" with "quiet happiness" that Jewsbury laments in "The Glory of the Heights" gains a new witness in Julia's frustrated expectations. Unlike Mr. Mortimer, who advises Julia that literary heights often elude or, worse yet, destroy women, *History*'s narrator reiterates the sentiments found in Jewsbury's poetry (25-26). In Julia this narrator admires the Promethean Power of "Glory," and comments on the difficulty of reconciling it with everyday life. "A dignified, but most rare and difficult union this!" Jewsbury exclaims in *History*; one may "circumscribe the claims of nature, or give latitude to those of mind; but to effect both at the same time, argues real superiority at once of principle and intellect" (27). While the narrator suggests the difficult union is possible, the narrative demonstrates what "mockery" it is "to dream of genius wed / To quiet happiness" ("Glory," lines 1-2). For most of *History*, Julia avoids the problem by rejecting one side of the

equation: whereas Annette desires marital bliss, Julia chooses "Fame" (*History*, 25). Thus, when Julia tells Cecil, "'You will find me Julia Osborne, wherever I am,'" she implies that no marriage will change her name or interrupt her career (69). Later, when Fame no longer equals happiness, Julia revisits her oversimplified equation: "Why cannot I *despise* love as I did twelve months since?" she wonders. "Fame and affection . . . have now a blent existence" for Julia, and her enthusiasm demands a romantic "communion of spirit" that has become "unattainable" (71-72, 106, emphasis original). Julia's "nearest approach to happiness" comes when basking in literary fame and familial affection, but she quickly learns that "there grow no thornless roses" for the literary enthusiast (104, 124-25). Amidst these reflections, the narrator comments parenthetically on her misjudgment: "(the reader will remember that Julia is not intended to personify high excellence)" (106). Here, two-thirds of the way through *History*, Jewsbury clarifies Julia's purpose: she proves that the enthusiastic woman forced to choose between her gift and her love is "inwardly, habitually unhappy" (128). Like Jewsbury's Promethean power in "Glory," Julia represents the enthusiast who, in building a lofty throne, has fitted herself to divine glory to the exclusion of domestic happiness. Even when she discovers she wants to, she cannot have both.

The atmospheric divide Jewsbury explored in *Lays of Leisure Hours* unlocks her fuller argument in *History*: the female enthusiast can achieve literary fame, but in elevating her mind she confines it to a lonely, liminal space between earthly and divine. According to Jewsbury, the life of the mind leaves the enthusiast "too etherial [*sic*]" to be fit for "the life of the body," a claim reinforced by Julia's admission that "contemplation, and the power of dreams, and . . .half-waking visions . . . are more to a young and poetical enthusiast than . . . daily existence" (*History*, 27-28, 48). As with the Promethean power in "Glory," Julia's ascent leaves her "shut out from the world," but "kindle[d] and exalt[ed]" by Fame to a place in "the high heavens" (48-

49, 50-51). In *History*, Julia willingly "surrender[s] ease, health, happiness, friends, [and] fortune" on Fame's altar so that this "'pent-up whirlwind in [her] spirit" may be lifted to a "more brilliant sphere" (77, 79). Like the speakers of "A Summer Eve's Vision" and "The Exile's Heart," Julia imagines that sphere as "an angel-peopled paradise" that supports the "spiritual world" of her mind; also like these speakers, she gravely misjudges (77). Julia has not yet realized the reality that Jewsbury's poetic speakers confront. In *Lays*, Jewsbury demonstrates that isolation is part of the female enthusiast's experience through multiple speakers' melancholy reflections; in *History*, she narrativizes that tragic realization in the blasted expectations of Julia Osborne.

If, in the end, Jewsbury seems to conclude with Mr. Mortimer that enthusiasm "imparts poison in an odour" (130), she qualifies that verdict in light of the social problems she sees confronting the woman of genius. Julia remains the novella's most interesting, sympathetic character, and Jewsbury allows her heroine to depart into self-exile without moralizing as she might have done were Julia a young recipient in *Letters*. Instead, she leaves her female enthusiast in a state of flux where she, like *Lays*' speakers, may retreat to a space of poetic contemplation, unmolested by the voices, religious and secular, that judge her lifestyle. Julia's final letter to Annette enacts this reflection. Julia laments that women like her cannot be recognized for lofty thinking and poetic affect in the same ways that men can. She complains, "A *man* may erect himself from . . . a state of despondency, throwing all his energies into some great work, something that shall beget for him 'perpetual benediction;' he may live for, and with posterity" (134, emphasis original). A man can achieve lasting fame by following his inborn enthusiasm. "But a woman's mind—what is it?" Jewsbury's heroine asks; "a woman—what can she do?—her head is, after all, only another heart" (134). According to Julia, women lack the detachment

enjoyed by male poets because readers interpret a woman's flights as soaring emotion, not thought. They presume that all "delineations of emotion . . . emanate from her own experiences" (133). For Julia—and, it would appear, for Jewsbury[59]—presuming autobiography undermines women writers' "power of self-command" (133). Without that self-command, women like Julia cannot use feminine restraint to regulate and enhance their enthusiasm. Confronted with an impossible choice between an enthusiast identity and conventional womanhood, Julia despairs: "To neither class do I belong entirely, yet I partake of the nature of both! I pay most of the penalties of one, without fully sharing in the privileges of the other" (133). In Julia's *History*, the two are irreconcilable, and enthusiasm becomes a scourge as much as a gift.

It is no surprise that Romantic-era readers aligned Jewsbury with the heroine of her career-defining *History of an Enthusiast*. The title fits both Julia and Jewsbury, but it had fit Jewsbury for quite some time. The closeness of enthusiast identity may help explain Jewsbury's disinclination for any single definition of the term. If she does settle on a reading of female enthusiasm, it seems largely pessimistic. From accounts of personal experience, to abstracted poetic meditations, to a fictional heroine who hits very close to home, Jewsbury paints the woman of enthusiasm as a masochist. Julia becomes a fictional elaboration of the "pains, its pleasures, and its penalties" Jewsbury herself bore "under [its] melancholy star" (*Letters*, 108). After Cecil Percy departs, shattering hope of romantic love, Julia weeps for her choice:

> The fiery dream of enthusiastic, yet faithful passion—the fancy-drawn portraiture of all she might have been—the quick and subtle, if wordless analysis, of all she was—the degrading sense of thralldom to artificial tastes and habits—the mournful impression of energies absorbed in trifles—vague feelings of duty, with utter dislike of its claims, coupled with a cold abandonment to desolate loneliness—were there not materials here for torture, and dreams, and tears! (*History*, 148)

[59] See Jewsbury's oft-quoted comment that the "'Three Histories' have most of [her]self in them" (Gillett, *Maria Jane Jewsbury*, lxv; Fryckstedt, "The Hidden Rill: II," 452).

This broken list recalls the Spirit's jarring characterization of Jewsbury's speaker in "To My Own Heart." For Julia, too, it would seem that "duty disregarded, reason spurned, / Knowledge despised, and wisdom all unlearned" have decided to "Punish the rebel who refused to bow" (lines 53-56). Julia's life implodes, and all that remains is to "stam[p] SELF-TORTURER on th' enthusiast's brow" ("To My Own Heart," line 57). But Jewsbury hesitates in the end, reflecting a career-long, unresolved relationship to the female enthusiast and to the Romantic-era discourses surrounding her. Jewsbury varies genre and voice to offer multiple perspectives on enthusiasm that range from praise to condemnation to, most significantly, ambivalence. Jewsbury withholds the stamp of "self-torturer" from Julia's brow and, by extension, from her own. Perhaps a sequel to *History* would depict Julia harnessing her enthusiasm through feminine restraint, or perhaps she would reject gender conventions, choosing a "winged head" to jettison the woman's body and its social limitations. When we examine the long trajectory of Jewsbury's engagement with enthusiasm, we find a rich body of productively contradictory thoughts but no ultimate prescription of a single remedy for enthusiastic tendency. Jewsbury's history of the female enthusiast remains incomplete, granting future women writers the freedom to finish it in ways Jewsbury's own time could not allow, even if she could already imagine them.

CHAPTER 5: ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING AND THE PRESERVATION OF FEMALE ENTHUSIASM

For the second-generation Romantic women writers discussed in the last three chapters, enthusiasm proved something of a "loose, baggy monster." Summoning at once prophetic zeal, poetic inspiration, and performative improvisation, it complicated an already precarious "genius" status for women of letters; moreover, the proliferation of female enthusiast speakers and characters in the 1820s and 1830s led to increasing conflation of the discipline-specific notions of fanaticism propagated by eighteenth-century theology, politics, poetics, and fiction. This popularization of the female enthusiast also revived earlier problems of authority as the Romantic poetess tradition became increasingly reduced to tragic love poems and calamitous pursuits of fame. With no viable pattern of female enthusiasm appearing among second-generation Romantics—Landon and Jewsbury died young, and Shelley migrated toward other topics in later life—the female enthusiast conundrum lacked a satisfying answer. If anything, its Victorian heirs confronted an even more tangled legacy surrounding questions of artistry and femininity. This chapter traces that legacy in the career of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, arguably the century's most self-conscious theorist of feminine poetics. EBB famously denied her literary grandmothers.[1] I read this rejection as, at least in part, a qualified rejection of their signature

[1] This chapter refers to works written both before and after Elizabeth Barrett's marriage to Robert Browning. For the sake of coherence, I have used the initials "EBB" throughout, a practice consistent with the poet's own practice and with the convention set by editors Marjorie Stone and Beverly Taylor ("Abbreviations, Primary Sources, and Website," in *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Selected Poems* [Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2009], xi). For EBB's rejection of her literary grandmothers, see EBB to H. F. Chorley, January 7, 1845, in *The Brownings' Correspondence: An Online Edition* (2018), accessed July 25, 2018, https://www.browningscorrespondence.com/correspondence/2048/?rsId=134509&returnPage=1; hereafter *BC*. See also Claire Knowles, *Sensibility and Female Poetic Tradition, 1780-1860: The Legacy of Charlotte Smith*

avatar: the female enthusiast. EBB redefines (and renames) female poetic vocation, updating the identity for a Victorian age that brought new challenges to its conceptions of spirituality, artistry, vocation, and gender.

EBB's career—like those of her rejected grandmothers—reveals a critical, conflicted relationship to female enthusiasm: her published and unpublished writings alike fixate on biblical prophetesses, Italian improvisers, and Romantic poets who embody motifs of inspiration and effusion. Her early writings praise and emulate Romantic strong feeling.[2] Theoretical essays and poems meditate on enthusiastic models from antiquity through the nineteenth century, struggling to reconcile their power and attendant danger. Later, nearly twenty years after the death of Letitia Landon and almost fifty after the publication of Germaine de Staël's *Corinne*, the enthusiasm of a young female poet forms the centerpiece of EBB's epic *Künstlerroman*, *Aurora Leigh* (1856). EBB's treatment of Aurora's genius pays a critical homage to her Romantic foremothers. EBB returns to the roots of their enthusiasms but evacuates Aurora's narrative and theory of overt references to that vocabulary in order to fashion for women a new, profession-based sense of poetic vocation. At the same time, she expands professional enthusiasm to Romney's philanthropy to ease gendered notions of fanaticism. By examining EBB's approaches to women's inspiration and emotionality, and by focusing particularly on *Aurora Leigh* as a case study of preservation, I conclude my exposition of the historical development of the female

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(Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 135; John Woolford, "Elizabeth Barrett and the Wordsworthian Sublime," *Essays in Criticism* 45.1 (1995): 36; and Kathleen Blake, "Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Wordsworth: The Romantic Poet as Woman," *Victorian Poetry* 24.4 (1986): 387.

[2] For the influence of Romanticism on EBB's formation as a poet, see Jane Stabler, "Romantic and Victorian Conversations: Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning in Dialogue with Byron and Shelley," in *Fellow Romantics: Male and Female British Writers, 1790-1835*, ed. Beth Lau, 231-53 (London: Routledge, 2009), 233-34; Knowles, *Sensibility and Female Poetic Tradition*, 137-39; and Marjorie Stone, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (New York: St. Martin's, 1995), 49.

enthusiast across the changing religious and aesthetic landscape of Romantic-era Britain and into the Victorian age.

From at least age twelve, EBB monitored the enthusiastic aspects of her own character, and she spends much of her career trying to discern their value without unleashing their dangers. EBB initially viewed controlled separation of religious and secular enthusiasms as the only path forward to legitimation, but she later admitted the possibility of their coexistence, even if she did not quite know how to achieve it. For many critics, *Aurora Leigh* represents the culmination of EBB's poetic theory and, as such, the resolution of EBB's inherited "conflicts between . . . male literary and female cultural economies."[3] I argue that this "mature" epic also represents EBB's answer to the historical question that propels the foregoing chapters of this dissertation[4]: How can the female enthusiast effectively (and safely) claim authority in the literary marketplace of nineteenth-century Britain? EBB recombines and reshapes female enthusiasms, but removes from them a term that had gained too many fatalistic examples during the Romantic period.

My argument takes shape in two movements: first, I read Aurora Leigh as a reconstitution of female enthusiast powers from antiquity and the Romantic age; second, I explain EBB's linguistic shift by tracing "enthusiasm" across the nascent poetic theory of her early autobiographical essays and *An Essay on Mind* (1826). These texts reveal EBB's early

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[3] Helen Cooper, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Woman & Artist* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 2. See also Knowles, *Sensibility and Female Poetic Tradition*, 156-57; Cora Kaplan, Introduction to *Elizabeth Barrett Browning:* Aurora Leigh *and Other Poems* (London: Women's Press, 1978), 5-36, rpt. in *Critical Essays on Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. Sandra Donaldson (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1999), 76-77; Deirdre David, "'Art's a Service': Social Wound, Sexual Politics, and *Aurora Leigh*," in *Critical Essays on Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. Sandra Donaldson (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1999), 157, rpt. from *Browning Institute Studies*, now *Victorian Literature and Culture* 13 (1985): 113-36; and Alice Falk, "Lady's Greek without the Accents: *Aurora Leigh* and Authority," in *Critical Essays on Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. Sandra Donaldson (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1999), 330, rpt. from *Studies in Browning and His Circle* (Armstrong Browning Library, Baylor University, Waco, TX) 19 (1996): 84-92.

[4] For *Aurora Leigh* as EBB's "most mature" work, see EBB to John Kenyon, October 17, 1856. This letter was prefixed to the fourth edition of *Aurora Leigh* (1859) and is reprinted in Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, ed. Margaret Reynolds (New York: Norton, 1996), 4.

distinction between religious and secular models, as well as a sustained effort to regulate her own enthusiastic nature. Reading these essays anew in light of *Aurora Leigh*'s veiled enthusiasm illustrates how the new professional female poet negotiates Romantic strong feeling, religious self-control, and gendered authority. Like her contemporaries Shelley, Landon, and Jewsbury, EBB frames this crucial debate via the discourse of enthusiasm. Unlike those earlier writers, she envisions a path forward. Her female poet not only survives but also gains esteem as a professional in the literary market. Social and etymological changes thus powerfully shape women's poetic enthusiasm by mid-century. Paradoxically, then, female enthusiasm gains a place in that new Victorian age by retiring its namesake standard-bearer: the female enthusiast.

I. EBB's (Non-)Enthusiast: Aurora Leigh

Unlike her more equivocating Romantic predecessors, the author of *Aurora Leigh* (1856) seems to have deemed the female enthusiast identity more alienating than authorizing. Indeed, EBB eventually removed from her lexicon all traces of "enthusiasm." In a text that was—as one reviewer famously complained[5]—two thousand lines longer than *Paradise Lost*, the absence of this word is conspicuous, especially given its prevalence in other nineteenth-century texts about poetic production. One could read EBB's eschewal of the term as an outright rejection of the problematic Romantic models it had come to represent. I offer another interpretation: that EBB avoids "enthusiasm" and all its forms in *Aurora Leigh* to preserve the enthusiast, not to silence her. She destigmatizes the Romantic-era female enthusiast by analyzing her origins and reconstituting her identity as something more acceptable, something thoroughly Victorian. EBB accomplishes this renovation by orchestrating Aurora's critique of her own naïve zeal, and by recasting the poet-heroine's enthusiasm as a set of qualities intrinsic, perhaps even essential, to

[5] [Coventry Patmore], Review of "*Aurora Leigh*. By Elizabeth Barrett Browning. 8vo. 1856," *North British Review* 26.52 (February 1857): 443-62, rpt. in Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, ed. Margaret Reynolds (New York: Norton, 1996), 423-25; qtd. from 424.

an artistic career. This non-clerical vocation possesses the magnitude of a religious calling and the force of prophetic inspiration. It also bears markers of the secularized improvisation women writers had found appealing in previous decades. For EBB, the female poet can (nay, must) be a prophetess and an *improvisatrice*, but she must also be a professional.

Feminist criticism has explored several models for the woman poet in *Aurora Leigh*,[6] but scholars tend to claim a particular model's priority rather than positing an amalgamation of historical and literary foremothers. Most cite Staël's Corinne, that fictional Anglo-Italian *improvisatrice* who gains literary fame but dies of scorned love.[7] Like Mary Shelley, EBB read *Corinne* at least three times in her early career, and she found its protagonist more inspiring than dangerous.[8] But, despite *Corinne*'s preeminence as the Romantic icon of female enthusiasm, we have seen that other models existed for Romantic-era women, and EBB likewise gives her new female poet the benefit of a rich, layered inheritance. For instance, she reaches back to Sappho and to the Hebrew prophetess Miriam to figure her new female poet,[9] and she inflects those

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[6] Kaplan, Introduction, 71-101; and Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (London: W. H. Allen Co., 1977), 179-83.

[7] See, for example, Knowles, *Sensibility and Female Poetic Tradition*, 151; Margaret Reynolds, *The Sappho History* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 118; Angela Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart* (Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1992), 78-79, 87-88; Cooper, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, 147; Angela Leighton, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1986), 117; Kaplan, Introduction, 81-89; and Moers, *Literary Women*, 179-83.

[8] See Leighton, *Victorian Woman Poets*, 78-79; and Chapter 2. EBB called *Corinne* an "immortal book" and argued that it "deserves to be read three score & ten times—that is, once every year in the age of man" (*BC*, 3:25). Earlier that year, she had responded to one "Miss Baker," who objected to books like *Corinne* "because they lead the mind to expect more in life than can be met in life: "Well!—allow that they do!—The expectation brings more happiness than any reality,—as realities go,—cd. do. Romance of spirit is a far rarer fault than worldliness of spirit. I wish I knew a few people who had been 'spoilt' by reading Corinne. I know nobody." See *The Diary of E. B. B.: The Unpublished Diary of Elizabeth Barrett, 1831-1832*, ed. Philip Kelley and Ronald Hudson (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1969), 221; hereafter *Diary*. For women's uneasiness about the Corinne myth, see Tricia Lootens, "Fear of *Corinne*: Anna Jameson, Englishness and the 'Triste Blaisir' of Italy," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 39.2 (2003): 178-89.

[9] Reynolds, *The Sappho History*, 118-20; Cynthia Scheinberg, *Women's Poetry and Religion in Victorian England: Jewish Identity and Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 76, 84-105; Cynthia Scheinberg, "Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Hebraic Conversions: Feminism and Christian Typology in *Aurora Leigh*," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 22 (1994), 55-72; and Alicia E. Holmes, "Elizabeth Barrett Browning:

models with religious ideas from Swedenborgian metaphysics to the truth-and-love doctrine of Congregationalism.[10] Scattered as these precursors and influences are over religious and literary history, a common feature emerges: an empowering but dangerous claim to enthusiasm. As previous chapters show, in the eighteenth century the term denoted prophetic fervor but increasingly connoted "fancied inspiration."[11] It drew disdain from religionists and literati alike. It also drew regulatory efforts from disparate sources: Evangelical reflection, Wollstonecraftian feminism, secularized poetic theory, and even strictures of poetic form. Given these lineages, EBB is understandably wary of female enthusiasm, yet she invokes it throughout *Aurora Leigh* by recalling female enthusiast figures and reviving their signature qualities. Rather than simply reproducing past tropes, however, she pursues a critical history of female enthusiasm and recombines its Romantic powers in her new female poet: Aurora Leigh. Aurora proves as enthusiastic and powerful as her prophetess, *improvisatrice*, and poetess foremothers, but she is reborn as a professional who critiques her problematic heritage to survive in the Victorian age.

Construction of Authority in *Aurora Leigh* by Rewriting Mother, Muse, and Miriam," *The Centennial Review* 36.3 (1992): 593-606.

[10] For EBB's interest in Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), see Nathan Camp, "The Christian Poetics of *Aurora Leigh* (with Considerable Help from Emmanuel Swedenborg)," *Studies in Browning and His Circle* 26 (2005): 62-72; Charles LaPorte, *Victorian Poets and the Changing Bible* (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2011), 23-66; Rebecca Stott, "'How do I love thee?': Love and Marriage," in *Elizabeth Barrett* Browning, by Simon Avery and Rebecca Stott (London: Pearson, 2003), 135-39; Marjorie Stone and Beverly Taylor, Introduction to *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Selected Poems*, ed. Marjorie Stone and Beverly Taylor (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2009), 38; Judy Oberhausen and Nic Peeters, "Ottocento Spiritualism: From Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Evelyn de Morgan," *Browning Society Notes* 32 (2007): 83-96, esp. 87; Richard Lines, "Swedenborgian Ideas in the Poetry of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning," in *Essays on Swedenborg and Literature: In Search of the Absolute*, ed. Stephen McNeilly (London: Swedenborg Society, 2004), 23-43; and Linda Lewis, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Spiritual Progress: Face to Face with God* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998), 11, 141-42, 199-200. For EBB's Congregationalism, see Karen Dieleman, *Religious Imaginaries: The Liturgical and Poetic Practices of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti, and Adelaide Proctor* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2012), 61-99; and Simon Avery, "Constructing the Poet Laureate of Hope End: Elizabeth Barrett's Early Life," in *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, by Simon Avery and Rebecca Stott (London: Pearson, 2003), 37.

[11] "Enthusiasm, n." *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, June 2017), accessed November 07, 2017, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/62879?redirectedFrom=enthusiasm.

Aurora proves an enthusiastic figure from the very beginning as EBB packs Book I with images of divine contact and strong feeling. These lead the younger Aurora to view herself as an enthusiast in form if not in name, and to characterize her poetic upbringing as that of Romantic poet-prophet.[12] For example, in remembering her parents, Aurora accesses two key enthusiast characteristics: fire and fervor. When she calls herself "[a] poor spark snatched up from a failing lamp,"[13] that is, her Italian mother, Aurora claims her mother's guidance in loosely biblical terms (a new "word" as "lamp unto my feet," so to speak) and her creative inheritance in Romantic ones (a generator, not a reflector, of literary light).[14] Aurora's emotional intensity also connects her childhood to both religious and Romantic notions of sensibility. The memory of waking "[w]ith an intense, strong struggling heart" at her father's death attributes that emotional intensity to her heart rather than to the moment itself (*Aurora Leigh*, I.209). She thus invokes "strong" feeling as a personal characteristic rather than an isolated response to grief, further characterizing her as a poet of enthusiasm. EBB's layering of religious outpourings, Wordsworthian "powerful feeling," and the poetess's emphasis on relational sensibility here fashion Aurora's poetic character as one of conflated enthusiasms, which, as we will see in the next section, also marked EBB's own early notions of the enthusiast-poet.

[12] In identifying Aurora not only as poet-prophet but also, more specifically, as "enthusiast" in these early books, I expand on the work of Dieleman, *Religious Imaginaries*, 91-92; LaPorte, *Victorian Poets and the Changing Bible*, 65; Scheinberg, *Women's Poetry and Religion*, 85-105; Christine Chaney, "The 'Prophet-Poet's Book,'" *SEL* 48.4 (2008): 798; Holly A. Laird, "*Aurora Leigh*: An Epical *Ars Poetica*," in *Writing the Woman Artist: Essays on Poetics, Politics, and Portraiture*, ed. Suzanne W. Jones (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 353-70, rpt. in *Critical Essays on Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. Sandra Donaldson (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1999), 279; and Kaplan, Introduction, 87.

[13] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, ed. Sandra Donaldson, vol. 3 of *The Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, gen. ed. Sandra Donaldson (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010), I.32, 207; hereafter *Aurora Leigh*.

[14] See Psalm 119:105, King James Version; and M. H. Abrams's inauguration of this critical thread in *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and Critical Tradition* (1953; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

Aurora's awakening to literary ambition follows a feverish conversion experience reminiscent of eighteenth-century Methodist spiritual autobiography.[15] As Andrew O. Winckles explains, women's conversion narratives in John Wesley's periodicals differ from men's, generally speaking, in their "focus on . . . inner spiritual transformation" as an "intense, often sensory, spiritual experience." They involve cognizance of error, justification through right doctrine, and a struggle to achieve spiritual perfection.[16] That Aurora's transformation evokes a formula so heavily associated with ecstatic conversion in the 1790s speaks to enthusiasm's role in establishing Aurora's poetic identity, and of its importance for EBB's poetics. Aurora's conversion occurs when her childhood ends, a transition marked by the journey to England and several conversion-related tropes: "the passage of delirium" associated with sickbed conversions; a "weary, wormy darkness, spurr'd i' the flank / With flame" that picks up religious imagery of light and dark; and finally, "[a] stranger with authority" who wrenches her from her caregiver, Assunta, and from Italy (I.217, 220-21, 224). Like the converts featured in Methodist periodicals, Aurora endures physical and mental anguish. Her sea voyage recalls biblical stories of Noah, Jonah, and Christ's apostles; as such, it could be viewed as a figurative baptism. Like the Christian's watery conversion, the act symbolizes Aurora's death and rebirth; moreover, the journey literally changes Aurora's life by bringing her to a new country where she will find her calling as a poet. The scene recalls Beatrice's painful turn toward self-reflection and Catholic orthodoxy in *Valperga*, as well as the real-life sickbed conversion of Maria Jane Jewsbury at

[15] See *Aurora Leigh*, I.215-22. Though not a Methodist herself, EBB occasionally defended the sect in family discussions; see *Diary*, 8, 10.

[16] Andrew O. Winckles, "'Excuse what deficiencies you will find': Methodist Women and Public Space in John Wesley's *Arminian Magazine*," *Eighteenth Century Studies* 46.3 (2013), 418. Winckles breaks the conversion formula into seven steps, which I have condensed into three (420). See also Misty G. Anderson, *Imagining Methodism in Eighteenth-Century Britain: Enthusiasm, Belief & the Borders of the Self* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 78-79; and Chapter 1.

Leamington.[17] In all three cases, an external force—abandonment, sickness, exile—compels the female enthusiast's introspection, reflection, and salvation. If, as Winckles suggests, Wesley's conversion formula offered a map to religious perfection,[18] then Aurora's rites of poetic "passage" can be understood as a map, too. In order to become the perfect female poet, she must recognize her enthusiastic condition, learn to regulate her strong feelings, and struggle against self and society to achieve a meaningful vocation that she hopes will also bring literary fame.

EBB's religious imagery aligns Aurora simultaneously with biblical prophecy and with a different kind of spiritual autobiography: William Wordsworth's *Prelude; Or, The Growth of the Poet's Mind*. Like Wordsworth, EBB figures her heroine as an inspired poet "looking for . . . the gods" and listening for "visionary chariots" (*Aurora Leigh*, I.552, 563). Aurora's early musings often include images of religious rites and sacraments as touchstones for her initiation into Romantic nature-worship: "baptized into the grace / And privilege of seeing," she recalls her "[c]ommunion and commission" with the Italian mountains (I.577-78, 626). First, EBB cements Aurora's election as poet through another baptism, this time more explicit but also more directly linked to Dissenting theology. Aurora's symbolic dedication does not occur in infancy; she becomes a poet through her own will and therefore receives the "grace" and "privilege" of that identity as a young adult. Second, and perhaps more importantly, Aurora is baptized into a faith of supernatural sight. We can think of this visionary power in Wordsworthian terms—"to see

[17] See Chapter 2; and Mary Shelley, *Valperga: or, the Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca*, ed. Nora Crook, in *The Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley*, gen. ed. Nora Crook and Pamela Clemit, 8 vols. (London: William Pickering, 1996), 262ff. For Jewsbury's conversion to Evangelical Christianity, see Chapter 4; Joanna Wilkes, "Jewsbury [*married name* Fletcher], Maria Jane [1800-1833], in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), accessed on February 14, 2017, http://www.oxforddnb.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/view/article/14816; Norma Clarke, *Ambitious Heights: Writing, Friendship, Love—The Jewsbury Sisters, Felicia Hemans, and Jane Welsh Carlyle* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 73; and Monica Correa Fryckstedt, "The Hidden Rill: the Life and Career of Maria Jane Jewsbury: I," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 67.1 (1984): 195-96.

[18] See Winckles, "Methodist Women and Public Space," 420.

into the life of things"[19]—or, as my conclusion will argue, as Aurora's beginnings as a Victorian "seer." Finally, EBB aligns Aurora's visionary actions both with the Romantic poet's intimate connection with nature but also the Christian's religious sacrament of contact with the crucified Christ. Aurora maintains the resulting sense of fellowship through dutiful acceptance of a literary great commission: she vows to spread the "central truth" she has found in Nature (I.800, 623-24).

Nature blends these worlds, too, reinforcing Aurora's conflated enthusiasm and EBB's imagining of poetic genesis through physicalized imagery. Nature's "apocalyptic voice" speaks loudly to Aurora, who in Book I is connected to that Nature via the even more palpable sense of touch: first as a "mutual touch / Electric" and then, more specifically, as "poetry's divine first finger-touch" (*Aurora Leigh*, I.674, 623-24, 851).[20] This second instance occurs atop the "holy hill" of Parnassus, where Aurora contemplates her own singing voice in a similarly physical way: she "felt [her] pulses set themselves / For concord" as "the rhythmic turbulence / Of blood and brain swept outward upon words" like a divine wind (I.884, 896-98). The "pulses" and "turbulence" of Aurora's circulatory system align her with Nature's rhythm, but EBB's focus on these physical evidences of enthusiasm also align her heroine with Romantic predecessors from P. B. Shelley to Landon's Improvisatrice. Aurora's own notions of inspiration confirm this reliance on an enthusiastic sense of poetic identity rooted in religious imagery and affinity with nature: she views the poet as a "palpitating angel" whose "flesh / Thrills inly with consenting fellowship" of transcendent spirits (I.912-13)—again, the idea of communion with the divine and with other nature worshippers involves a rapid heartbeat and a mutual touch. Fittingly, Aurora's

[19] William Wordsworth, "Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour, July 13, 1798, in *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, ed. James Butler and Karen Green, vol. VII of *The Cornell Wordsworth*, gen. ed. Stephen Parrish (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975-2007), line 50. Wordsworth's seeing power follows being "laid asleep" to "become a living soul" (lines 46-47).

[20] Scheinberg reads this passage as an example of EBB "debunk[ing] the myths of artistic identity" associated with Mosaic and classical conventions (*Women's Poetry and Religion*, 95-96).

fervor reaches an enthusiastic pitch as she ascends to the place of nature poet near the end of Book I, where she "palpitated forth": "While breaking into voluble ecstasy, / I flattered all the beauteous country round, / As poets use" natural features to elevate themselves and their surroundings (I.1128, 1118-19). Her received idea of poetry at this juncture requires strong feeling, physically expressed, to fulfill her holy commission; to invoke it, she relies on the spiritual emblems of a male, Romantic, visionary literature.

While Aurora's prophetic inspiration evokes that of male Romantics, EBB constructs her epic heroine with explicit reference to female models. The oft-cited crowning scene of Book II is EBB's most direct homage to Corinne as the nineteenth century's eminent female enthusiast,[21] but less recognized are the ways in which religious and secular enthusiasms converge in these passages through references to zeal as fire. The "poor spark" of Book I becomes a defiant flame when Romney questions Aurora's poetic calling: "'Stop there,'" she exclaims, "burning through his thread of talk / With a quick flame of emotion, – 'You have read / My soul, if not my book'" (*Aurora Leigh*, II.243-46). With the flame of strong feeling and the sense that her soul—not her book—houses an increasingly fiery character, Aurora wields enthusiasm to defend her chosen career. The fire metaphors persist for 800 more lines of searing dialogue until EBB physicalizes Aurora's soul-flame in her eyes: "He struck the iron when the bar was hot," she recalls of her condescending cousin; "No wonder if my eyes sent out some sparks" (II.1002-3). As previous chapters show, fiery eyes historically indicated zeal in many religious communities,[22] and the trope was borrowed in texts like Mary Shelley's *Valperga* to convey prophetic energy in female

[21] Aurora crowns herself in II.33-64. The passage is widely cited by critics, for example: Knowles, *Sensibility and Female Poetic Tradition*, 152-53; Leighton, *Victorian Woman Poets*, 87-88; Leighton, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, 130; and Moers, *Literary Women*, 182.

[22] Susan Juster, *Disorderly Women: Sexual Politics & Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 18, 127-28.

enthusiasts. Thus, when EBB figures Aurora's anger and zeal through ocular flame, she revives a long history of religious zeal as a way for enthusiastic women to proclaim their power in the face of disbelieving or dismissive men. When Romney strikes against the iron of Aurora's newly forged poetic identity, the sparks of her true metal/mettle show her own strength but also summon that of the female enthusiasts she emulates.

Aurora's fiery initiation into enthusiastic tradition drives her to revisit her earlier poetics, and, instead of listening for the "visionary chariots," she takes her place in one. EBB's use of "we" when Aurora describes those who take the "journey" in "Art's fiery chariot" identifies her as a prophetic "singer" (III.58-59). This claim acts as a fulcrum between Aurora's desire to produce her own music in Book I and EBB's theorizing of poetic harmony in Book V, discussed later. Soon after the chariot passage, EBB pairs supernatural sight with transcendent voice in Aurora's view of the Red Sea, where she experiences poetic inspiration as prophetic synesthesia:

> surprised
> By a sudden sense of vision and of tune
> You feel as conquerors though you did not fight,
> And you and Israel's other singing girls,
> Ay, Miriam with them, sing the song you choose. (III.199-203)

In this moment of sensory overload, EBB grants Aurora vicarious power as a "conqueror" but also as a "singing girl" in the biblical tradition of Miriam. As Cynthia Scheinberg observes, EBB "invokes the Hebraic type for female, prophetic agency"[23]; however, in doing so, she also shifts the ground of her engagement with nineteenth-century British ideas of enthusiasm. Invoking Miriam resumes the prophetess model that Jewsbury and Landon had largely secularized or abandoned. Aurora's collection of foremothers includes both Corinne and Miriam, and EBB finds in this dual mothering a way for her female poet to retain the *improvisatrice*'s literary eloquence while reclaiming the "theological authority" that had been lost with the silencing of

[23] Scheinberg, *Women's Poetry and Religion*, 85.

prophetess-oriented enthusiasm in the late 1820s and 1830s.[24] EBB does not accept Miriam's motherhood unconditionally, however. She knows that Miriam's history, like Corinne's, includes rejection and tragedy.[25] Accordingly, EBB admits that prophetic fire brings the singing woman danger as well as privilege: she is "apt to singe [her] singing-robes to holes" (III.59). Aurora's secular and religious mothers show how the very qualities that enable women's poetry can destroy the woman poet. Recognizing this conundrum, EBB mitigates Aurora's enthusiasm from early books, fostering an ethic of regulation that keeps intact robes and singer alike.

In *Aurora Leigh*, EBB thus defines regulation as the female poet's ability to critique her literary foremothers, as well as her own youthful inclinations. The text consistently highlights Aurora's mature reflections on youthful naïveté: "In those days, . . . I never analyzed, / Not even myself. Analysis comes late" (I.954-55). As with other early poetic experiences, she recalls emotional immersion in physical terms: "I wrote because I lived – unlicensed else; / My heart beat in my brain" (I.956, 960-61). After a matter-of-fact (and perfectly scanning) admission in "I wrote because I lived," EBB foregrounds the overpowering influence of emotion with an iamb/trochee pair that creates the visceral thudding of a cerebral heartbeat. This line's heart-and-brain imagery shows how feeling invades thought's domain in Aurora's early poetic process, and it helps explain her conception of the poet as self-authorizing. Her writing is licensed by personal experience alone. Similar claims were cited to discredit prophetesses as uninspired and to trivialize women's writing as insular, but the mature Aurora recognizes this trap as part of poetic growth: "For me, I wrote / False poems, like the rest, and thought them true / Because myself

[24] Scheinberg finds both "literary and theological authority" in EBB's invocation of Miriam (*Women's Poetry and Religion*, 86), but I read this dual power as deriving from the Corinne-Miriam combination instead. Alternatively, Dieleman argues that, while EBB sometimes casts poet as prophet, she "does not completely endorse this model of the poet," instead casting Aurora as "poet-preacher" interested in the "democratic and dialogic over the authoritative and visionary" (*Religious Imaginaries*, 62, 91-92).

[25] For a summary, see Scheinberg, "Feminism and Christian Typology in *Aurora Leigh*," 307.

was true in writing them" (I.1022-24). So, not only is Aurora's poetry licensed by nothing more than her own experience, but it is also self-authorized as truth. She recognizes in her youthful poems a misguided self-importance: "I have been wrong, I have been wrong. / We are wrong always when we think too much / Of what we think or are" (IV.439-41). As Karen Dieleman observes, "the older, narrating Aurora criticizes her earlier exalted view of the poet," recognizing the narcissism of placing herself on the "mountain-peaks" as an object of worship rather than below as a humble intermediary.[26] EBB shows the narcissism of her received enthusiast models—male Romantics like Wordsworth and female improvisers like Corinne—and even of a young Elizabeth Barrett. For example, in EBB's unpublished essay, "Glimpses into My Own Life and Literary Character" (1820), she recalls her naïve certainty that reading "Popes [sic] Homer" would engender feelings of her "own SUPERIORITY." Then, as a more mature narrator (if only by a few years), she admits her "childish folly & ridiculous vanity" and exchanges it for "immense and mortifying inferiority" (125). As the next section shows, EBB learned from experience the dangers of self-authorization in youthful poetry,[27] and she frequently marked these events in her own life with the characteristics and language of enthusiasm. Even without like terminology, Aurora's recognition evinces like sentiment: insofar as Romantic enthusiasm means naïve self-confidence, it hinders rather than helps the aspiring poet.

Despite Aurora's recognition of her enthusiasm and her attempts to safeguard against its dangers, her interactions with other characters subject her to many of the social critiques directed at women of genius in the nineteenth century. Her cousin and aunt's comments in Book II reflect longstanding historical biases against enthusiastic women as heretical, witchlike, or unwomanly.

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[26] Dieleman, *Religious Imaginaries*, 93; *Aurora Leigh*, II.534; qtd. in Dieleman.

[27] Jon Mee uses "self-authenticating" to describe eighteenth-century enthusiasts (*Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003], 6, 8); and LaPorte calls EBB's poetry "self-justifying" (*Victorian Poets and the Changing Bible*, 24).

For example, when Romney returns Aurora's lost book, he quips: "'I saw at once the thing had witchcraft in't, / Whereof the reading calls up dangerous spirits: / I rather bring it to the witch'" (II.77-79). Playfulness thinly veils Romney's stereotyping of female enthusiasm. He does not read Aurora's book, but only uses it as proof of her heterodoxy: the book has witchcraft, and witchcraft is dangerous, so its owner (Aurora) must be a witch calling up spirits through evil spells. Later, he links "witch" with "scholar, poet, [and] dreamer" in opposition to his ideas of conventional womanhood, revealing his fear-driven dismissal of women's ability to be poets (II.85-87). Romney also undermines Aurora by addressing her as a collection of physical traits—"moist eyes / And hurrying lips and heaving heart" (II.260-61)—often used to delegitimize female sensibility. Aurora's unfeeling aunt also notes these enthusiastic markers, and she reads them as physical maladies or, worse, as signs of demonic possession: "'You . . . [h]ave got a fever," she judges after Aurora rejects Romney's proposal (II.655-56). She interprets Aurora's "passionate" defenses as "convulsions" typical of "Italian manners" (like her mother's, but also like Corinne's) but not suitable for "English girls" (II.721-31). Aurora's aunt thus joins Romney in condemning enthusiasm based on tired critiques of the three Romantic-period models I have discussed so far: the hysterical prophetess, the foreign *improvisatrice*, and the sensibility-maddened poetess. Like Miriam or, a closer example, British millenarian Joanna Southcott (d. 1814), Aurora is accused of bodily heresy; like Corinne, she is criticized for unfamiliar womanhood; and like the lovelorn heroines of Romantic periodical verse, she is dismissed as overly passionate. With an aunt who thinks her possessed and a suitor who calls her a "witch," Aurora begins her career haunted by common prejudices against female enthusiasm.

In Book V, the center of her epic *Künstlerroman*,[28] EBB crafts Aurora's theoretical discourse on the nature and responsibilities of professional-based sense of poetic vocation as a response to the social critiques and crisis of conscience she experiences in Books I-IV. It opens:

> Aurora Leigh, be humble. Shall I hope
> To speak my poems in mysterious tune
> With man and nature? – with the lava-lymph
> That trickles from successive galaxies
> Still drop by drop adown the finger of God? (*Aurora Leigh*, V.1-5)

Aurora's search for harmony with "man and nature" as well as the universe demands humility, not egotism. EBB joins John Keats in critiquing Wordsworthian ego,[29] but her paradoxical ambition to humble the female poet employs the Percy-Shelleyan ideas that attracted her from a young age.[30] The "lava-lymph" image of this passage modifies Shelley's metaphor for Keats's poetry in *Adonais* (1821), but, more importantly, Aurora's "hope" to compose "in mysterious tune / With man and nature" recalls *A Defence of Poetry*'s dictum that poets should harmonize, not just melodize, which demands they be attuned to the social causes of the day.[31] In Book I's story of poetic awakening, Aurora found her heart and mind instinctively aligned with Nature's rhythm, but the mature narrator Aurora seeks to humanize—and thereby harmonize—her verse.

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[28] For *Aurora Leigh* as *Künstlerroman*, see Charles LaPorte, "*Aurora Leigh*, *A Life-Drama*, and Victorian Poetic Autobiography," *SEL: Studies in English Literature* 53.4 (2013): 832; Rebecca Stott, "'Where Angels Fear to Tread': *Aurora Leigh*," in *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, by Simon Avery and Rebecca Stott (London: Pearson, 2003), 182-83, 200; Alison Case, "Gender and Narration in *Aurora Leigh*," *Victorian Poetry* 29 (1991), 17-21, 25-26; Rachel Blau Duplessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 84-87; and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 575-80.

[29] See John Keats to Richard Woodhouse, October 27, 1818, in *The Letters of John Keats, 1814-1821*, ed. Hyder E. Rollins, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 387. Marjorie Stone borrows Keats's term when she argues that Aurora's assertiveness "match[es] the Wordsworthian 'egotistical sublime'" ("Genre Subversion and Gender Inversion: *The Princess* and *Aurora Leigh*," *Victorian Poetry* 25.2 [1987], 116). See also Woolford, "Elizabeth Barrett and Wordsworth," 36-56; and Blake, "Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Wordsworth," 389.

[30] For EBB's early Percy-Shelleyan affinities, see LaPorte, *Victorian Poets and the Changing Bible*, 23, 26.

[31] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, 2nd edn, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, (New York: Norton, 2002), 511. See also Chapter 2.

In reality, though, Aurora is only interested in connecting with a particular kind of humanity, and in a particular way. She wants her enthusiasm to attend to the earthly—"harvest-time," "sexual passion," "fears, joys, grieves, and loves"—but Aurora soon reveals her true desire for elevation, which means joining not with common people but with other "ecstatic souls" reaching toward "a world / Beyond our mortal" (*Aurora Leigh*, V.11, 15, 14, 20, 23-24).[32]

On the surface, EBB imagines her heroine as a poet of the people, but her text frequently skips over the worms in favor of the heavens that captivate Aurora. Borrowing again that key music metaphor of Romantic poetry, Aurora questions whether she can "speak [her] verse . . . in tune with" humanity and its "theurgic nature" (V.24-25, 30). She claims interest in aligning herself with other humans, but only in their "theurgic" or supernatural aspects. This problem plagued P. B. Shelley, too, and indeed becomes a major point in Romney's critique of poets who "play at art" (II.229). While the rest of Book V brings Aurora down to earth somewhat by couching her poetics within very human doubts about her ability to embody this new profession-based sense of poetic vocation, the opening verse paragraph's notions of "human" and "humble" reveal that Aurora's lofty, enthusiastic nature persists in her mature narrator-self. Her revelation of doubt may be an attempt to counter a naïve, narcissistic past, but EBB does not empty her heroine of enthusiasm or of the narcissism that accompanied it in youth. Even as the mature Aurora performs the beneficial "analysis" that "comes late" in a poet's career (I.955), she is not wholly disengaged from her critiques of problematic Romantic models. In fact, she sees their foibles in her own nascent poetic theory.

One crucial difference between Aurora Leigh and most Romantic-era Corinne figures, then, is her introspective critique of the enthusiastic tradition she joins. EBB's formal choices help her achieve this innovation on the Corinne-poetess tradition. Much as the Victorian novel

[32] See also Laird, "An Epical *Ars Poetica*," 279.

explodes the Regency-era marriage plot by moving weddings to early chapters, EBB reimagines the Corinne tradition's narrative by placing its crises in the first two books of a nine-book epic. Unlike previous heroines, Aurora survives childhood misunderstanding, early-career egotism, and ill-fated romance—all featured in Books I and II—to become a mature poet who can reflect on those past foibles and narrate present events from a more experienced perspective, even as she still struggles with some of her youthful proclivities. With the benefit of time and distance, she sees the necessity of regulating enthusiasm, and she identifies the mechanisms that helped her achieve that regulation and shape a professional poetic theory moving forward.

Some of Aurora's regulatory influences—her aunt, the English climate, Victorian gender norms[33]—she regrets as harmful constraints on her genius, but others demonstrate her conscious formation of a professional literary identity. For instance, Book I describes how her "inner life" calms the fever of her physicalized enthusiasm: "through forced work and spontaneous work," it "Reduced the irregular blood to a settled rhythm" and "Made cool the forehead" (*Aurora Leigh*, I.1057-60). With "irregular blood," EBB alludes to hysteria, a pseudo-medical diagnosis linked with female enthusiasm even in the nineteenth century; moreover, the warm forehead recalls Aurora's fevers after her journey to England and after her father's death. With the settling of the blood's "rhythm," EBB uses a metaphor of female bodily regulation to show how Aurora the young poet gains the ability to calm spontaneous effusions into alignment with Nature and, in this passage, into well-crafted, regular verse. No feats of elision can make "Reduced the irregular blood to a settled rhythm" scan as regular iambic pentameter, but the following lines become increasingly regularized. "Made cool the forehead with fresh-sprinkling dreams" contains the proper number of syllables but disrupts the iambic rhythm, and the next lines scan more cleanly until we reach a solid line of iambic pentameter at verse paragraph's end: "The dogs are on us –

[33] See *Aurora Leigh*, I.251-69, 384-455.

but we will not die" (I.1059-66). The calming of blood from her woman's heart allows for the cooling of her poet's head, transforming Aurora's outpourings into poetry commensurate with professional artistry. EBB uses similar imagery to describe Aurora's conscious efforts toward poetization (and away from gender stereotypes) in Book II: "[I]f heads / That hold a rhythmic thought, must ache perforce, / For my part I choose headaches" (II.106-8). In order to choose headaches over the "decenter," "proper," more womanly heartaches she thinks Romney would approve (II.112-13), however, Aurora must learn to regulate her enthusiasm to avoid dismissal as a hysterical woman. Unlike the male Romantic poets EBB idolized in her youth, EBB's mature female poet must protect the workings of poetic intellect from the spontaneous, overflowing emotions that would compromise her writing and undermine her professional authority.

EBB weaves a number of regulatory motifs into *Aurora Leigh*. Since much critical attention has been paid to text's birdcage imagery,[34] I focus here on another recurrent image of restraint: the taming of women's hair as a symbolic controlling of feminine emotion.[35] This imagery is not unique to *Aurora Leigh*, of course. Recall how Euthanasia's hair is "confined by a veil . . . wreathed round her head" in *Valperga*, where she symbolizes a feminized approach to regulating enthusiasm.[36] EBB avoids veiling her heroine but still chastens her hair to cast active restraint in a feminine light. In Book I, the braid represents a womanhood predicated on vigilant self-restraint, most explicitly in Aurora's aunt's "somewhat narrow forehead braided tight / As if for taming accidental thoughts / From possible pulses (*Aurora Leigh*, I.272-74). The aunt binds

[34] See, for example, Olivia Gatti Taylor, "Written in Blood: The Art of Mothering Epic in the Poetry of Elizabeth Barrett Browning," *Victorian Poetry* 44.2 (2006): 157.

[35] According to Elisabeth G. Gitter, the Victorians were fascinated with "the ambiguity of hair symbolism" ("The Power of Women's Hair in the Victorian Imagination," *PMLA* 99.5 [1984]: 939). EBB's readers would have recognized woman's hair as symbolizing, alternatively, her "special virtue" and her erotic power, her "instrument of expression" and the mechanism of her imprisonment (Gitter, "The Power of Women's Hair," 943, 942, 938, 941).

[36] Shelley, *Valperga*, 78. See also Chapter 2.

womanly strictures around a mind she fears, which implies that a woman's mind, even one so rigidly controlled, can produce "pulses" of thought and emotion. And pulses, even hypothetical ones, are to be feared. Aurora laments how she internalized this restrictive attitude as a young girl, and she later describes as destructive and physically painful: "I broke the copious curls upon my head / In braids, because she liked smooth-ordered hair" (I.385-86). The breaking of her curls represents the breaking of Aurora's Italian spirit and its enthusiastic associations—her mother, her spark, and the language of improvisation—into an English orderliness. Long after she has crowned herself a new Corinne and has loosed her hair, she reflects on that broken tie to Italy:

> My loose long hair began to burn and creep,
> Alive to the very ends, about my knees:
> I swept it backward as the wind sweeps flame,
> With the passion of my hands. Ah, Romney laughed
> One day . . (how full the memories come up!)
> ' – Your Florence fire-flies live on in your hair,'
> He said, 'it gleams so,' Well, I wrung them out,
> My fire-flies; made a knot as hard as life
> Of those loose, soft, impracticable curls.
> And then sate down and thought. (V.1126-35)

Aurora's "Florence fire-flies" reinforce her enthusiasm's Italian heritage and may represent the resilient sparks of the mature poet's flame-like hair; moreover, as Elaine Showalter points out, the Victorian era revived dramatic tropes linking women's "loose long hair" with madness and hypersexuality.[37] Aurora's hair must be tamed in order to avoid compromising associations, but Aurora now completes that task herself. With a violent wringing comparable to the pull of strict(ure) braids, Aurora's mature self-regulation seems as conservative and potentially damaging as her aunt's; however, EBB foregrounds the contrast made lines earlier between this hard knot and Aurora's naturally flowing, burning hair. EBB reframes the chastening of the woman's hair as a crucial part of her artistic development, not simply as a way of signaling her

[37] Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 11, 90-91.

sexual purity. These regulatory practices, though harsh, are not necessarily permanent. For Aurora, perhaps for EBB as well, maturing as a poet means learning to inhabit a fragile paradox. The female poet does not give up—or give herself up to—enthusiastic tendency. Aurora avoids the crushing imperative of gendered approaches to regulating genius and instead uses self-reflection to determine a mode of regulation that enhances rather than erases her power.

After critiquing problematic models and modeling self-regulation, *Aurora Leigh* contemplates a new female poet whose approach to her enthusiastic inheritance is shaped by Victorian notions of literary artistry and vocation. Whereas the Corinnites discussed previously materialized firmly during the Romantic age and, understandably, adhered largely to its preferred models of individualized inspiration and effusion, EBB creates a female enthusiast who values Art with a capital "A." She does not reject individual emotion; she increases its scope. "Half agony, half ecstasy," her new artist sits "['t]wixt two incessant fires": a personal flame and a "refraction" of the universal, which are linked in the "crystal conscience" of the "artist-born" (*Aurora Leigh*, V.76-80). For EBB, this state confers power by ecstatic, personal enthusiasm but also through public conscience and responsibility. Her many metaphors of God as supreme artist help explain this conundrum,[38] and *Aurora Leigh*'s overarching claim of artistic greatness for the woman poet perpetuates an enthusiastic model while also legitimizing its authority. By pursuing "Art for art, / And good for God Himself," the female poetic tradition EBB's Aurora inaugurates surpasses its heritage: "We'll keep our aims sublime, our eyes erect, / Although our woman-hands should shake and fail; / And if we fail . . But must we?" (V.69-73). EBB questions the prevailing notion—based on one enthusiast after another succumbing to heightened affect—that women cannot achieve higher models of poetic enthusiasm. As Claire Knowles argues, EBB rejects feminized affective models of poetic production in favor of less gendered modes that

[38] For God as artist in *Aurora Leigh*, see V.434-35, VI.149-51.

privilege a more "intellectual, creative and transcendent" production that elevates verse. Her heroine, Aurora Leigh, can therefore "spea[k]" with authority."[39] Aurora realizes, and EBB argues, that the female enthusiast as artist, not as poetess, can survive in the Victorian age by avoiding self-indulgence and attending instead to a broader human consciousness.

EBB's new enthusiast also professionalizes the received female genius model, making it more sustainable by figuring poetry as vocation. Critics have observed Aurora's more vocational approach to poetry—she plans a career trajectory and narrates its gritty details[40]—but her plot also heralds changes for female enthusiasm. As early as Book III, Aurora recognizes that, "on Parnassus-mount / You take a mule to climb and not a muse / Except in fable and figure" (III.191-93). With this nod to mythical enthusiasts like Sappho, Miriam, and Corinne (and we might add second-generation Romantic iterations like Landon's Improvisatrice and Jewsbury's Julia Osborne), EBB reveals her plan to revivify their particular brand of female genius. She gives the female enthusiast identity new life, but she also gives it a Victorian female body. Aurora recognizes—history demonstrates—that enthusiastic ability cannot bring itself to the font without sustained labor.[41] By juxtaposing the Parnassus quip with Miriam's singing—nodding to classical and biblical enthusiasms—EBB strengthens the counter measure of Aurora's presence and industry: "I worked with patience, which means almost power: / I did some excellent things

[39] Knowles, *Sensibility and Female Poetic Tradition*, 152; Kaplan, Introduction, 76. See also O. Taylor, "Written in Blood," 162; Stott, "'Where Angels Fear to Tread,'" 203; Cooper, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, 148; and Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets*, 80.

[40] See Chaney, "The 'Prophet-Poet's Book,'" 794; O. Taylor, "Written in Blood," 153; Kathleen Hickok, "'New Yet Orthodox'—The Female Characters in *Aurora Leigh*," *International Journal of Women's Studies* 3 (1980), 479-89, rpt. in *Critical Essays on Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. Sandra Donaldson (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1999), 135-36; Duplessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending*, 465; and Kaplan, Introduction, 76.

[41] See Scheinberg, *Women's Poetry and Religion*, 95-96.

indifferently, / Some bad things excellently" (III.204-6).[42] Even as she rejects overflow-only poetry, EBB also disdains the other extreme. In other words, the poet needs natural genius but must hone it into a professional skill set through a process that includes failures, mediocrities, and qualified successes. Fittingly, Aurora's autobiographical style relies on abrupt shifts from the everyday to the enthusiastic. One moment she toils at prose to buy time for verse (a lifestyle common among Romantic-era women writers),[43] and the next she muses on inspiration as "fiery sap, the touch from God, / Careering through a tree" to inspire that toil (III.308-9, 330-31). Aurora never denies ecstatic inspiration, but she does suggest that poetry requires more than explosive personal feeling. Work and patience transform the poet from enthusiast to professional. As Book VIII argues, the poet needs both "the artist's ecstasy" and the quotidian "feast, fast, or working-day" in order to manifest Art's "spiritual significance" as truth (VII.858-60). By recognizing her enthusiastic abilities while also attending to the realities of poetic production, Aurora Leigh shows poetry as vocation. She escapes the isolation felt by the prophetess or *improvisatrice*, and gains a life's work to live for.

As reviewer H. F. Chorley noted, "Such a poem . . . has never before been written by woman," and, as many critics have added since, such a poem had never been written *about* a woman either: "the high thoughts, the deep feelings, and the fantastic images" of *Aurora Leigh* "showe[r] over the tale with the authority of a prophetess, the grace of a muse, the prodigality of a queen."[44] Impressed with *Aurora Leigh*'s lofty intellect, strong feeling, fantasy, and vision, Chorley praises EBB's work in religious, poetic, and political terms. He also praises her author-

[42] Scheinberg emphasizes Aurora's locating of "true poetry within human culture" ("Feminism and Christian Typology in *Aurora Leigh*," 316).

[43] Prominent first-generation examples include Mary Robinson and Charlotte Smith. Among second-generation women like Landon and Shelley, reviews and gift-book commissions provided supplemental income.

[44] [H. F. Chorley], Review of "*Aurora Leigh*. By Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Chapman & Hall," *The Athenaeum* 1517 (November 22, 1856): 1425-27, rpt. in *Aurora Leigh* (Norton), 403-7; qtd. from 407.

speaker persona in vocabulary linked with the female enthusiast she had seemingly exiled from the text. *Aurora Leigh*'s significance as a recovery and re-visioning of Romantic enthusiasm shows in the thoroughness of Chorley's compliment, and suggests that Victorian readers likely perceived the layering of enthusiast models I have delineated here. *Aurora Leigh* represents EBB's attempt to recover the spiritual authority lost by the secularization of female enthusiasm while still retaining the powerful links her Romantic-era predecessors forged within revived Sappho and Corinne mythologies. EBB's poetic theory recasts inspired verse as the production of mature artistry and advocates poetry as a legitimate vocation for women of genius; moreover, her innovative form creates space to shift the narrative of female enthusiasm and to discuss it critically. Her successful renegotiation declares a cultural shift in gendered ideas of enthusiasm and poetry and changes women's sense of poetic vocation for future generations. The Romantic female enthusiast dies and is resurrected in *Aurora Leigh*, where EBB adapts and preserves her enthusiasm for a new Victorian poetry. As Aurora prescribes, she has once again been made a poet of the age.

II. Enthusiasm Before *Aurora Leigh*: EBB's Romantic Juvenilia

Comparing EBB's remaking of the female poet as non-enthusiast in *Aurora Leigh* with her juvenile disquisitions on enthusiasm reveals a marked shift in her conceptions of poetry and poetic vocation over time. Decades before she would craft the Victorian period's foremost theory of the woman writer as literary professional, a young Elizabeth Barrett flirted with the Romantic-era model of poet as enthusiastic genius; across the 1820s, she worked to separate and then to reunify religious and secular notions of inspiration and emotionality. This section traces the development of EBB's enthusiasm in her juvenilia and early poems to establish her investment in the concept before its nominal disappearance from her later work. In "My Own Character"

(1818), EBB's youthful enthusiasm clashes with her impetus for self-reflection. Two years later, "Glimpses into My Own Life and Literary Character" (1820) develops what Charles LaPorte calls EBB's early "celestial aesthetic," a poetic philosophy that holds in "interdependence" EBB's Romanticism-inflected poetics and her "evangelical emotion."[45] I reframe this tension via the discourse of enthusiasm EBB invokes in these texts: reading the young poet as a Romantic enthusiast helps explain her productive conflation of religious and literary fervor at this stage. I conclude by showing how *An Essay on Mind* (1826) follows the principles of EBB's juvenile autobiographies to their logical conclusion: that enthusiasm is necessary for writing poetry, and for establishing poetic identity. Composed during what we consider the Romantic period, these texts largely reflect its aesthetic values and its anxiety about compromising associations with religious enthusiasm. They also reflect EBB's conceptualization and revision of a Romantic enthusiast identity, one that would shape how she articulates the artistic and professional trajectory of her own career, as well as that of her fictional female poet, Aurora Leigh.

As early as age twelve, EBB incorporated the vocabulary of enthusiasm into her private reflections, but she already expressed unease at the social implications of enthusiasm's power. "My Own Character" notes EBB's early tendency to "seek truth with an ardent eye, a sincere heart," and a "very passionate" disposition (119, 120). Such linkages between enthusiasm and "ardent" feelings, especially as figured in women's eyes, have been documented in previous chapters; in EBB's summary, these indicators of passion show her willingness to own (if not necessarily boast about) the strong feeling she saw in the Romantic poets of her youth. EBB's acknowledgement of these characteristics arrives in this text through the filter of religious introspection. As one editor notes, what appear as Lockean musings in EBB's autobiographical

[45] LaPorte, *Victorian Poets and the Changing Bible*, 48, 45. According to LaPorte, EBB's early career reveals her quest to "reconcile the Romantic cult of poetry with conservative biblical hermeneutics" (37).

essays can be more accurately described as "spiritual self-examination" in the eighteenth-century Evangelical mode.[46] Like the heroines of *Valperga*, a young EBB acknowledges self-reflection's difficulty and her avoidance of it: "I have never, even in imagination looked into my own heart," she confesses, before opining, "The investigation of oneself is an anxious employment" ("My Own Character," 119). Perhaps EBB's reluctance to imaginatively self-evaluate reflects the same faults that deter Shelley's Beatrice: confidence in her own inspiration and feelings, and a desire for notoriety through their expression. In this first memoir, then, EBB seems more keen to value imagination for its own sake than to appreciate its capacity for self-critique and self-control.

Tensions between EBB's seemingly uncontrollable emotion and her constant efforts to control it drive her second, much longer autobiographical reflection, "Glimpses into My Own Life and Literary Character." Given that she later deletes "enthusiasm" from her professional vocabulary, EBB appears remarkably comfortable using it to describe her youthful poetic disposition in this text: forms of the word appear no less than eleven times in "Glimpses," almost always self-referentially. According to her own account, EBB's enthusiastic character manifested at age three when she became "renowned amongst the servants for self love and excessive passion" ("Glimpses," 122).[47] It seems unlikely that, at three years old, EBB demonstrated passion in the vein of the heroines, prophetesses, and poetesses discussed already; however, the passage of time and the eventual protuberance of sentimental qualities probably led EBB to begin her memoir of literary character with the headstrong child replete with what she viewed as

[46] "Two Autobiographical Essays by Elizabeth Barrett," *Browning Institute Studies* 2 (1974): 119-34, 119n. As the anonymous "Editor" points out, the two essays reproduced in this article were once privately held, but the manuscript of "Glimpses into My Own Life and Literary Character" is now at the Huntington Library. The two essays have been published in *BC*, I, Appendix III, 347-56. "Glimpses" has lately been reproduced in *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. Josie Billington and Philip Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). For EBB and Evangelicalism, see LaPorte, *Victorian Poets and the Changing Bible*, 23-24, 45.

[47] See also Avery, "Constructing the Poet Laureate of Hope End," 27; and Cooper, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, 12-13.

the makings of poetic greatness. EBB's admission of her toddler reputation prefigures her later disquisitions on poetic narcissism in *Aurora Leigh*, and by characterizing her youthful passion as "excessive," she figures it as an overpowering trait to be monitored and regulated as she grows.

Having established herself as an enthusiast from the cradle, EBB freely uses the term and its cognates to describe her adolescent personality in "Glimpses." The first instance coincides with her introductions to Greek History and to poetry, where she "first found real delights" ("Glimpses," 124). The passage reveals the eight-year-old subject's need for "something dazzling to strike [her] mind" and "excit[e] ardent admiration," but it also shows the fourteen-year-old author's compulsion to revive the strong feeling of that initiation experience: "nor can I now remember the delight which I felt on perusing those pages without enthusiasm" (124). The layering shows enthusiasm's sustained influence on EBB's response to poetry, and even to her own meditations on poetic experience. This persistent enthusiastic character shows in recurring vocabulary and repeated images across EBB's early writings. For example, "Glimpses" revives "My Own Character"'s use of "ardent," which in the above quotation characterizes EBB's admiration of poetry. It later describes ten-year-old EBB, who "felt the most ardent desire" to learn ancient languages and "sighed for so long . . so ardently!" over the literary fame she perceived as inaccessible ("Glimpses," 124-25). "Ardent" and "fervent" commonly describe enthusiastic figures in literature of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and these words' usage persists at the time of this essay's composition. EBB evokes those overlapping archetypes: the prophetess, the improvising poets, and the man of feeling.

EBB's early memoirs also appropriate the physical attributes of enthusiasts as recognized during the Romantic period; fires and fevers make several appearances in her "Glimpses." For example, EBB mentions "the fever of a heated imagination" at age eleven, and at twelve her

"imagination took fire" at "a sudden flood of light" she interpreted as a sign of God's forgiveness (126). Interestingly, while Romanticists readily invoke examples like William Blake's vision of "a tree filled with angels" as evidence of inspiration,[48] this visionary episode in EBB's childhood has received little or no attention, perhaps due to gender- or period-based assumptions. But here, as with Romantic poets, the event bears immediate significance for EBB's notion of poetry as inspired and inspiring. EBB links the "flood of light" to her imagination, and her imagination to enthusiastic warmth. In the very next sentence, she recalls how Shakespeare, Milton, and Pope metaphorically elevate her blood's temperature: "I have often felt my soul kindled with the might of such sublime genius & glow with the enthusiasm of admiration!!" ("Glimpses," 126).[49] Her soul kindles and glows like a flame, its intensity reinforced by the double exclamation at the sentence's end. The fire metaphor pertains to both religious and literary enthusiasms, and reappears when EBB writes that her "admiration of literature," early described as enthusiastic, "can never be . . . extinguished but with life" ("Glimpses," 128). At this juncture of her life as a reader and writer of verse, Elizabeth Barrett not only lived in what we now call the Romantic period, but she also understood lived experience through its formulation of poetic genius as a volatile, fiery, innate force that commands emotional desire, inspiration, and admiration.

It makes sense that an aspiring poet would appropriate the language of strong feeling that marked the literature of her childhood, and that she would cast herself as an enthusiast in the

[48] Biographer Alexander Gilchrist records the vision as Blake's first and specifies that it occurred when he was between eight and ten years old (*Life of William Blake . . . A New and Enlarged Edition*, 2 vols. [London: Macmillan and Co.,1880], I, 7). See also John Beer, *William Blake: A Literary Life* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 10.

[49] For echoes of Shakespeare in EBB's poetry, see Gail Marshall, "Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Shakespeare: Translating the Language of Intimacy," *Victorian Poetry* 44.4 (2006): 467-86. For the Victorians' obsession with Shakespeare, see Charles LaPorte, "The Bard, the Bible, and the Shakespeare Question," *ELH* 74 (2007): 609-628, esp. 609-610. For EBB and Milton, see Erik Gray, *Milton and the Victorians* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 37-41, 168-70; Sarah Annes Brown, "*Paradise Lost* and *Aurora Leigh*," *SEL* 37.4 (1997): 723-40; and Woolford, "Elizabeth Barrett and Wordsworth," 51-52.

tradition of Wordsworth and Byron, even of Shakespeare and Milton as they were revived as predecessors of Romantic natural genius.[50] In 1828, eight years post-"Glimpses" and two years after publishing her first collection of verse, EBB described Byron as a quintessential enthusiast: "he was a real poet! . . . [He] thr[e]w himself, in a transport of enthusiasm, on the earth before a cross, & kiss[ed] the feet of the Crucified. You see—the knowledge was not there—but the feeling was there!"[51] Byron's enthusiasm appears in "transport," which signifies a "state of being 'carried out of oneself'" and into a state of "vehement emotion," "mental exaltation, rapture, [or] ecstasy."[52] Despite his physical body being flung "on the earth," Byron's spirit is exalted heavenward by "the feeling" that, for EBB, surpasses the religious knowledge one might expect to inspire such prostration; moreover, EBB claims that feeling makes Byron "a real poet." Her use of "transport" conjures up the "ecstatic utterance" used by male Romantics to describe flights of poetic fancy,[53] and by Mary Shelley in *Valperga*: Euthanasia is "elevated by poetic transport"

[50] For EBB's early Byronism, see Stone and Taylor, Introduction, 12-14; and Stabler, *Romantic and Victorian Conversations*, 235-39. For EBB's admiration of Wordsworth, see LaPorte, *Victorian Poets and the Changing Bible*, 35; Cooper, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, 37; Woolford, "Elizabeth Barrett and Wordsworth," 45-47; and K. Blake, "Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Wordsworth," 388.

[51] Elizabeth Barrett to Hugh Stuart Boyd, 1[-3] May 1828, *The Browning Letters* (Armstrong Browning Library Digital Collections, Baylor University), accessed January 11, 2017, http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/ab-letters/id/23102.

[52] "transport, n." *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), accessed July 7, 2018, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/205016?rskey=fRP7NA&result=1&isAdvanced=false.

[53] "transport," *OED*. For Romantic poetry and "transport," see Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 54. Some examples include Canto 12 of Percy Bysshe Shelley's *The Revolt of Islam*, which begins, "The transport of a fierce and monstrous gladness / Spread through the multitudinous streets" (*The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 3 vols. [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999], vol. II, lines 1-2); and Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto 4, CXIX.4; (*Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. by Jerome J. McGann, vol. II [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980–93]); and Byron's *Don Juan*, Canto 1, stanzas 88-89 (*Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, vol. V). The word also appears several times in Wordsworth's *Prelude*, often referring to youthful transport amidst scenes of nature (see II.376, 410; VIII.111; XI.150; XII.142; and XIII.109, in *The Fourteen-Book Prelude*, ed. W. J. B. Owen, vol. XXII of *The Cornell Wordsworth* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985]). For *Aurora Leigh* and Wordsworth's *Prelude*, see K. Blake, "Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Wordsworth," 389-98.

and Beatrice gives herself up to "uncontrollable transport."[54] Comparing Byron with *Valperga*'s heroines, we again see the enthusiastic woman's double bind: like the male poet, she needs transport to authorize her art; unlike the male poet, she must monitor and control her transport in order to be taken seriously. In her early poetic career, EBB noticed the heightened sensibility of her Romantic enthusiast predecessors, both male and female. She praised the qualities that aligned them with religious zeal, even in the absence of religiosity itself.

In "Glimpses," EBB sees poetic feeling as necessarily bound up with spiritual fervor; moreover, as uses of "enthusiasm" in this text show, she had not yet separated poetry from prayer or poet from prophet. EBB moves quickly among literature, philosophy, and religion, "blurr[ing] conventional distinctions between forms of inspiration"[55] and conflating modes of spiritual and secularized elevation under the umbrella of enthusiasm. "Metaphysics" brought her "highest delight," a phrase that invokes the "enthusiastic sensation" of "high delight" in standard eighteenth-century aesthetic theory but also calls to mind religious ideas of God's service as "delight" in the Psalms, in the *Book of Common Prayer*, and in Congregationalist hymnody ("Glimpses," 126).[56] Accordingly, EBB's memoir conflates responses to natural and supernatural phenomena: "the pure and wide expanse of Ocean" and the immense "majesty of God" similarly cause her heart to "thro[b] almost wildly with a strange and undefined feeling" ("Glimpses," 130). Lockean philosophy leaves her mind not only "edified but exalted" ("Glimpses," 126). At

[54] Shelley, *Valperga*, 314, 149.

[55] LaPorte, *Victorian Poets and the Changing Bible*, 25.

[56] William Gilpin, "Essay II," in *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty; On Picturesque Travel; and On Sketching Landscape* (London: R. Blamire, 1792), 49-50. The *Book of Common Prayer* for the same year frequently uses "delight" or "great delight" (*The Book of Common Prayer, and Administration of the Sacrament, According to the Use of the Church of England* [London: T. Davison, 1792], 475, 485, 487 497, 507). See also Hymns 78, 309, in *The Congregational Hymn Book: A Supplement to Dr. Watts's Psalms and Hymns*, comp. The Congregational Union of England and Wales (London: Jackson & Walford, 1836). In citing this particular hymnbook, I follow Dieleman, *Religious Imaginaries*, 38. The word "delight" appears 24 times in the King James Version of Psalms.

fourteen, EBB conceives of faith, philosophy, and literature as products of imagination. As such, they were available to her as a nascent poet and religionist to recombine in new ways. With her heart and mind "in commotion" from "internal reflections & internal passions" ("Glimpses," 127), inspiration and imagination define her as an enthusiast in conventional Romantic terms.

Perhaps most telling is the extent to which the young Elizabeth Barrett, more than any writer discussed in this dissertation so far, conceived of herself as an enthusiast according to Romantic-era theological definitions of the term. At age twelve, she found herself

> in great danger of becoming the founder of a religion of my own[.] I revolted at the idea of an established religion. My faith was sincere but my religion was found solely on the imagination. It was not the deep persuasion of a mild Christian but the wild visions of an enthusiast. ("Glimpses," 126)[57]

EBB's disdain for institutionalized religion and her capacity to flout it by creating her own belief system link her strongly with the Romantic-era Dissenters commonly labeled "enthusiasts." It was an insult hurled at Methodists who preached without book or followed the teachings of those who did.[58] EBB recalls nearly joining these maligned religionists by establishing a new faith on "imagination" alone. Indeed, "enthusiastic faith" leads her away from the "pure & simple" rites of Anglicanism's book toward original prayers "composed extempore and full of figurations and florid apostrophes to the Deity" ("Glimpses," 126). She infuses her religion with poetry in ways she recognizes as dangerously self-authorizing, especially for women. Whereas male Romantics like Blake and Wordsworth could admit their childhood ecstasies, EBB knows that "the wild visions of an enthusiast" do no favors to the young woman who seeks poetic fame ("Glimpses," 126). Since EBB is often billed as a secular (or at least noncommittally religious) poet in a religious age, her early fervor may come as a surprise; however, as LaPorte and Dieleman show,

[57] See also Avery, "Constructing the Poet Laureate of Hope End," 37.

[58] See Anderson, *Imagining Methodism in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 49-50, 53; and Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 14, 64, 71.

EBB's theology influenced her poetry far more than many modern scholars acknowledge.[59] To judge her "naturally independent" mind apart from its early formation in religious dissent is to give an incomplete account of EBB as poet ("Glimpses,"131). These roots of enthusiasm inaugurate and continue to inflect the growth of her poet's mind.

Along with restoring the narrative of Elizabeth Barrett the self-described enthusiast, we should also acknowledge that she, like her female Romantic predecessors, was acutely aware of enthusiasm's social effects and worked to mitigate them in public view. In "Glimpses," much more than in "My Own Character," EBB seems preoccupied with controlling the uncontrollable in her early character. Her "mind has and ever will be a turmoil of conflicting passions," her feelings are "acute in the extreme," and "the strength of [her] imagination" is "often too powerful for [her] controul" ("Glimpses," 128, 130, 127). Though she hopes "in time at least [to] keep them under some controul," EBB does not view enthusiasm as dangerous enough to squelch it immediately or entirely. Instead, she recognizes that doing so would be to nullify her gift (127). In this way, "Glimpses" reiterates the Lockeanism of "My Own Character" and echoes Romantic theories of the poet-prophet. In 1818 EBB had quibbled with Locke's denial of innate principles in human beings but ultimately conceded that certain principles only appear innate because "the faculties of some men are more sensible to impressions than those of others" ("My Own Character," 120-21). Wordsworth had argued along these lines in his "Intimations Ode" and was at this time revising a similar claim in *The Prelude*. Thus, EBB's sense that "energy or perhaps impetuosity . . . allows [her] not to be tranquil" strikes a quintessentially Romantic balance between the "powerful feeling" she celebrates and the tranquility she disdains for "precluding in

[59] LaPorte, *Victorian Poets and the Changing Bible*, 23-25; and Dieleman, *Religious Imaginaries*, 23-29.

great measure the intellectual faculties of the human mind!" (127-28). But eventually, she, like Wordsworth, found "recollection in tranquility" essential to the poetic process.[60]

Imagination, sentiment, and enthusiasm: these "attributes" she "stud[ied] to subdue" in her poetic education ("Glimpses," 127). With this "study," EBB joins Shelley and Jewsbury in characterizing self-control, unlike the emotions it seeks to tame, as a learned quality. "Glimpses" delineates how a young EBB developed a critical eye to counteract her throbbing heart. Around twelve or thirteen she began to "read to gain idea's [*sic*] not to indulge [her] fancy" (126). These efforts only go so far, however, and she finds herself at fourteen "still as proud as willful as impatient of controul as impetuous but thanks be to God it is restrained" (126, 127). As with the enthusiasts before her, self-control does not change her character; it merely shapes it in more socially acceptable ways. At this juncture she constructs a stoic alter ego for public consumption:

> I have acquired a command of my self which has become so habitual that my disposition appears to my friends to have undergone a revolution—But to myself it is well known that the same violent inclinations are in my inmost heart and that altho' habitual restraint has become almost a part of myself yet were I once to loose the rigid rein I might again be hurled with Phaeton far from every thing human . . every thing reasonable! (127-28)

EBB's self-control, like that of her forerunners, is "acquired" through "habitual restraint." EBB uses "habitual" twice in this short passage, insinuating that presenting as a reformed enthusiast requires diligent monitoring and exertion—a "rigid rein" to control a wild horse. A few pages later, she reiterates the sentiment and much of the language: "I have so habituated myself to this sort of continued restraint, that I often appear to my dearest friends to lack common feeling!" (130). From the vantage point of fourteen, EBB devotes considerable time and energy to self-control and personal improvement because she knew they would affect public opinion and, eventually, the reception of her work. Her cataloguing of successes and failures in restraint

[60] Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, in *Cornell Wordsworth*, VII, 756. See also Chapter 1. For *Aurora Leigh* and Wordsworth's *Prelude*, see K. Blake, "Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Wordsworth," 389-98.

prefigures *Aurora Leigh*'s attention to gendered double standards of emotionality, and to other female enthusiasts' (often unsuccessful) strategies for dealing with them. Perhaps her early sense that "nothing is so odious . . . as a damsel famed in story for a superabundance of sensibility" keeps her signature heroine, like her young self, "carefully restrained!" ("Glimpses," 130).

Shifts in EBB's religious affinities between 1818 and 1820, and again by the mid-1840s, show the effects of this early restraint on her enthusiastic identity. In "Glimpses," she recalls how "religious enthusiasm had subsided" by the age of thirteen—between her two memoirs—and she began "to advocate for the cause of the church of England!" (127).[61] But EBB's newfound institutional religion does not preclude imagination. She admits to still being "borne away from all reason" by its "fatal power" ("Glimpses," 127). In attempting to divide spiritual from secular powers, EBB draws a nominal line between the regrettable naïveté of her youth and the strong feeling of a mature reader. At fourteen, she describes her character thus:

> My religion is I fear not so ardent but perhaps more reasonable than formerly and yet I must ever regret those enthusiastic visions of what may be called fanaticism which exalted my soul on the wings of fancy to the contemplation of the Deity—My admiration of literature, especially of poetical literature, can never be subdued nor can it be extinguished but with life. ("Glimpses," 128)

EBB laments draining the "ardent" feeling essential to her childhood spirituality; that is, until she links it with controversial religious feeling. She now considers "enthusiastic visions" fanatical rather than freeing, and the exaltation of her soul relies on "fancy," which famously played

[61] As Dieleman has shown in detail, EBB later abandoned this position and maintained a Congregationalist identity. See, for example, her letter to William Merry on November 2, 1843: "I am not myself a member of the Church of England" (rpt. in *The Religious Opinions of Elizabeth Barrett Browning as Expressed in Three Letters Addressed to Wm. Merry, Esq. J.P.*, ed. by the Rev. W. Robertson Nicoll, LL.D. [London: privately printed, 1896], 13). Letters from this collection are hereafter cited as *Religious Opinions*. EBB's ecumenism shows in her occasional private defense of Methodist practice in the 1830s (see *Diary*, 8, 10), and in her embrace of Swedenborgianism in the 1840s (see LaPorte, *Victorian Poets and the Changing Bible*, 48; and Stone and Taylor, introduction, 38).

second fiddle to "imagination" in Romantic poetics.[62] Diminishing her religious enthusiasm in these ways helps EBB foreground its more acceptable cousin: zeal for literature. This strategy anticipates the moves she makes in *Aurora Leigh* when her heroine recognizes, chastens, and qualifies her enthusiasm. In adolescence, however, EBB had not yet learned to restore that enthusiasm in a productive manner. In "Glimpses," she instead habituates herself to creating a clear division between her formerly conflated religious and poetic zeal. In doing so, she finds a temporary strategy for managing the enthusiasm that she saw as endangering her literary goals and reputation. She extricates and subdues the part known to compromise professionalism.

EBB's compartmentalizing approach in "Glimpses" does not necessarily mean that she opposed religiosity to intellectualism, or that she continued to view enthusiasm in terms of a spiritual versus secular dichotomy. We have seen from *Aurora Leigh*'s blending of Sappho, Miriam, and Corinne that EBB can house both faith-based and secularized enthusiasm within the same epic, indeed within the same poet. We see from a career that boasts religious and non-religious verse alike that EBB could be that poet herself. And, theologically speaking, we see how EBB's ecumenism informs these views as she works to disentangle various enthusiasms in the years before writing *Aurora Leigh*. For example, on October 20, 1831, she debated with one Mr. Curzon "about the compatibility <<or>> incompatibility of intellectual & religious <<pleasures>>." "Of course," she quips, "[Hugh Stuart] Boyd & I took the right side of the question," presumably that of "compatibility" based on contemporaneous exchanges with Boyd (*Diary*, 163). As she built toward her epic, EBB became less interested in wrenching spiritual fervor from literary admiration, and her early divisive tendencies seem to arise from concerns about how she and her work would be perceived. As little as fifteen years before *Aurora Leigh*,

[62] See, for instance, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's use of "fancy" to describe undesirable enthusiasm (Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 12, 176).

EBB could not admit a melded poet figure without rejecting melded enthusiasm as her driving characteristic. Like Aurora, she exhibits and values enthusiastic qualities, but they have been carefully sorted and reassembled to avoid compromising associations with her predecessors.

Additional diary entries from the early 1830s reveal EBB's partitioning of literary zeal from religious fervor in her writing about prophecy. These private writings show that she viewed herself as a prophet; however, like P. B. Shelley and like Mary Shelley's fictional prophetess Euthanasia, EBB approaches prophecy from Greek rather than Hebrew models.[63] In September 1831, she uses two figures of speech: "prophesying ill" and "prophet of ill," both reflexive and, more significantly, both in Greek (*Diary*, 112, 137).[64] These interpolations could be explained as language practice since, after all, EBB was studying Greek while translating *Prometheus Bound*. But she never includes whole Greek sentences in this diary, nor does she translate other religious phrases, despite their frequency. She reserves Greek for prophecy and, in one particular instance, for poetry. On September 24, 1831, EBB praises P. B. Shelley's elegy *Adonais* as "perfectly exquisite" before calling Shelley himself "one of [those sitting near the gods], without any doubt" (*Diary*, 138).[65] The bracketed text has been translated from EBB's Greek. She employs it to register proximity to deity, as well as the special knowledge that comes of it. By connecting that knowledge to a specific poem, EBB yokes poetry and prophecy together and to Greek

[63] As Scheinberg points out, EBB's study of Hebrew did not begin until 1832, and several poems from her later 1830s publications contain untranslated Hebrew words "coincident with very important statements about religious or literary authority" (*Women's Poetry and Religion*, 70-76, qtd. from 76). Most of her 1831 *Diary*'s religious disquisitions engage with the contemporary Calvinism versus Arminianism or contemplate a more ecumenical Christianity in Britain. See also *Religious Opinions*.

[64] These phrases have been translated by *Diary* editors Philip Kelley and Ronald Hudson.

[65] These thoughts cohere with EBB's earlier sense of Shelley's poetry as "too immaterial for our sympathies to enclasp it firmly"; she writes, "it reverses the lot of human plants: its roots are in the air, not earth!" (*Diary*, 103). They also bring to mind Jewsbury's description of Shelley in her review of *The Wandering Jew*, published earlier that same year: "a winged head, unable to walk the earth, but at home when soaring through the sky ("Shelley's 'Wandering Jew," *The Athenaeum* 194 (July 16, 1831), 457; see Chapter 4. For EBB and P. B. Shelley, see LaPorte, *Victorian Poets and the Changing Bible*, 23, 26, 32, 47; and Stabler, "Romantic and Victorian Conversations," 235.

traditions of both. Shelley would likely have appreciated this assessment since his own idea of poets as prophets relied heavily on the Greek *vates* figure.[66] The linguistic details of EBB's personal reflections at this juncture reveal a similar belief that the kind of prophet matters when it comes to legitimizing oneself as a poet, and especially as a poet for the age.

EBB's early published volume, *An Essay on Mind, with Other Poems* (1826), mediates the private theories of her adolescent memoirs and her 1831-1832 diary, distilling them into her most explicit assertion of poetry's vitally enthusiastic nature. The volume's preface declares, "Poetry is the enthusiasm of the understanding."[67] Given EBB's total avoidance of "enthusiasm" in *Aurora Leigh*, which spends thousands of lines theorizing poetry, this early definition is striking. It affirms the centrality of enthusiasm for Romantic poetics, but it also extends that theory by asserting that poetry *is* enthusiasm. Here, EBB seems to have taken P. B. Shelley's view of poetry as a particular brand of enthusiasm based in understanding, or intellectual reason, not in physicalized religious fervor. The title poem clarifies this distinction: "Poesy's whole essence, when defined, / Is elevation of the reasoning mind."[68] Taken together, these definitions of poetry reveal enthusiasm as necessary to its creation and to its primary function of enhancing the power of reason through feeling. EBB aligns pure reason with Philosophy but argues that it "cannot plainly see" without the aid of "Poetic rapture, to her dazzled sight" (*Essay*, II.910). Furthermore, Poetry educates Reason: "inward sense from Fancy's page is taught, / And moral feeling ministers to Thought" through the tools of verse: "metaphor," "eloquen[ce]," and, most

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[66] For EBB and the Romantic revival of poet as *vates*, see LaPorte, *Victorian Poets and the Changing Bible,* 25.

[67] Elizabeth Barrett, Preface to *An Essay on Mind, with Other Poems*, in vol. 4 of *The Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, gen. ed. Sandra Donaldson (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010), 78.

[68] Elizabeth Barrett, *An Essay on Mind, with Other Poems*, in vol. 4 of *The Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, gen. ed. Sandra Donaldson (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010), II.944-45; hereafter cited parenthetically as *Essay*. See also Simon Avery, "Audacious Beginnings: Elizabeth Barrett's Early Writings," in *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, by Simon Avery and Rebecca Stott (London: Pearson, 2003), 58.

aptly, "Poetic fire" (*Essay*, II.946-47, 956-58). Her earlier cautions about "fancy" and "feeling" have matured into a recognition that these impulses have significant roles to play in the growth of the poet's mind. Thus, while EBB claims that only one sort of enthusiasm will work for the poet, she concedes that the poet cannot work at all without enthusiasm's mysterious power.

EBB depicts the poetic process as a magical extraction of beauty and intellect from physical sensation. The task, carried out by the poet's soul and mind, looks like this:

> When pleasing shapes and colours blend, the soul
> Abstracts th' idea of *beauty* from the whole,
> Deducting thus, by Mind's enchanting spell,
> The intellectual from the sensible. (*Essay*, II.83-86; italics original)

EBB imagines the soul as the main actor in poetic composition, and Mind provides the "spell" that draws reason from sense.[69] But, as Mary Shelley had recognized only a few years earlier, the abstraction could never be performed cleanly, even with the aid of magic. Intellectual enthusiasm had become inextricably tangled with more physicalized, prophetic understandings of the term, meaning that when EBB commits to a Romantic idea of poetry as inherently and beneficially enthusiastic, she must also admit Romantic feeling into her formula for poetic insight. Perhaps EBB realized that even lofty enthusiasm often takes the forms of sense. Indeed, from Shelley forward, we see women writers' insistence on female enthusiasm as embodied experience and, particularly with Jewsbury's Julia Osborne and EBB's Aurora Leigh, on increasingly vocational notions of enthusiasm as applied reason working through feeling to teach, delight, and elevate.

"Enthusiasm" is conspicuously absent from *Essay* the poem, but its manifestations as inspiration, strong emotion, and poetic effusion fill EBB's philosophy via a familiar alternative catchword: "genius." With her frequent invocations of Genius, EBB anticipates Jewsbury's *Lays of Leisure Hours* (1829) and *The History of an Enthusiast* (1830), which nearly synonymize the

[69] Later in Book II, EBB invokes "Enchanting Poesy," granting it a similar spellbinding or, in this case, inspiring power as Mind itself (*Essay*, II.940).

term with enthusiasm and make it a prerequisite for literary fame. In *Essay*, Genius retains three key characteristics of enthusiasm: heightened energy that appears in metaphors of fire and sunlight, variance in receptivity to that energy, and the calling of enthusiastic minds to reflect it from divinity to humankind. "Genius glows," EBB writes in Book I,

> And fitful gleams on various mind bestows:
> While Mind, exalting in th' admitted day,
> On various themes, reflects its kindling ray.
> Unequal forms receive an equal light [.] (*Essay*, I.86-91)

With the "kindling ray" of Genius's sun, EBB invokes enthusiasm's ubiquitous fire and light imagery; by making that ray equally distributed but unequally received, she implies that the poet's mind more readily perceives and reflects Genius's power. Genius thus proves a "mystic essence" that can "define / The point, where human mingles with divine" (*Essay*, I.127, 202-3). An earlier metaphor illustrates this point: in *Essay*, EBB figures Byron as "the Mont Blanc of intellect," a sublime figure "O'erlook[ing] the nations" from his place "'Twixt earth and heav'n" (*Essay*, I.70-71). This metaphor clarifies EBB's Romantic conception of genius as the quality that elevates poets to a glorified position between human and divine. As Simon Avery puts it, EBB views Byron as both "spiritual and humanitarian leader."[70] Fifteen years later, she saw P. B. Shelley in a similar though less positive light: "high, & yet too low," an "elemental poet, who froze in cold glory between Heaven & earth, neither dealing with the man's heart, beneath, nor aspiring to communion with the supernal Humanity."[71] For EBB, genius's mingling power also isolates and chills individual poets, even those who reflect its rays most brightly. Her description of Shelley in particular echoes Jewsbury's "The Glory of the Heights" (1829), where the poet

[70] Avery, "Audacious Beginnings," 59.

[71] EBB to Mary Russell Mitford, June 14, 1841 (*BC*, 5:60), qtd. in Stabler, "Romantic and Victorian Conversations," 235.

inhabits the "chilling zone" between earth and heaven.[72] The in-betweenness of the poet's vocation can foster connections to humanity and divinity, but more often it disconnects the poet from both realms.

Whether or not EBB read Jewsbury's poem, she appears to have developed a similarly dire view of the effects of poetic genius on actual poets during this period, and her elegiac verses on Felicia Hemans and Letitia Elizabeth Landon reflect on how the Corinne myth materialized for many second-generation women writers in particular.[73] Fortunately for EBB, another fifteen years would bring her greater—if still cautious—confidence in the enthusiastic view of the poet she develops in *Aurora Leigh*. As Chapter 4 shows, Jewsbury's creation of enthusiast-heroine Julia Osborne quickly follows "The Glory of the Heights" and others poems evincing like skepticism about genius and happiness coexisting; she died a mere three years later. EBB, on the other hand, spends years developing her enthusiastic female poet. In the "most mature of [her] works," decades of trial and error yield her "highest convictions upon Life and Art," and with them a more critical, more nuanced, and therefore more viable embodiment of female poetics.[74] By examining the longer arc of EBB's enthusiastic poetics, we see that Aurora Leigh the speaker and *Aurora Leigh* the text both cohere in important ways with EBB's earliest articulated theories of a conflated religionist and poet, as well as her own complicated poetic zeal. EBB's critical engagement with enthusiasm from her private autobiographical essays and her most mature and

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[72] Maria Jane Jewsbury, "The Glory of the Heights," in *Lays of Leisure Hours* (London: J. Hatchard and Son, 1829), line 46; see also Chapter 4. EBB also anticipates Aurora's retrospective critique of her youthful exaltation of the poet to the "mountain-peaks" (*Aurora Leigh*, II.534; qtd. in Dieleman, *Religious Imaginaries*, 93).

[73] See Elizabeth Barrett, "Felicia Hemans. To L. E. L., Referring to her Monody on the Poetess" (1835/1838) and "L. E. L.'s Last Question" (1839), in *Poems*, 4th edn. (1856), vol. 1 of *The Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. Marjorie Stone and Beverly Taylor, gen. ed. Sandra Donaldson (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010), 535-46. See also Brandy Ryan, "'Echo and Reply': The Elegies of Felicia Hemans, Letitia Landon, and Elizabeth Barrett," *Victorian Poetry* 46.3 (2008): 249-27, esp. 265ff.

[74] EBB to John Kenyon, October 17, 1856. This letter was prefixed to the fourth edition of *Aurora Leigh* (1859) and is reprinted in *Aurora Leigh* (Norton), 4.

very public work, *Aurora Leigh*, illuminates one strategy for preserving the female enthusiast in a Victorian age that did not exactly celebrate radical ideas of womanhood. Aurora is certainly no "angel in the house,"[75] but neither is she a tragic Corinne figure. EBB reconstitutes Romantic female enthusiasm while largely avoiding charges of unwomanliness through Aurora's eventual marriage and, more importantly, through her more acceptable vocationalized enthusiasm.

In the mid-nineteenth century, usage of the word "enthusiast" changes in two important ways. First, writers and speakers in the 1850s and 1860s increasingly use the term alongside a particular object of zealous interest or in conjunction with prepositions like "of" or "for," i.e. a classical music enthusiast, or an enthusiast for political reform. While we do not see this new zeal explicitly called "enthusiasm" in *Aurora Leigh*, either, the idea does emerge in EBB's characterization of Romney. The "social theory" to which he has wed himself, as Aurora quips in Book II, becomes the subject and expression of his own fiery passion (*Aurora Leigh*, II.410). Second, a split happens in the word family I have been discussing: beginning in the nineteenth century, "the disparaging sense" of "enthusiast" rises while "enthusiasm" or "enthusiastic" become more positive, suggesting that the identity sinks in social estimation even as its defining qualities retain value or even prestige.[76] Both these shifts appear in today's usage, and they reflect how secularization has interacted with authorial decisions like EBB's in *Aurora Leigh*. She rejects "enthusiast" as a title for her heroine but proudly retains a nuanced hereditary enthusiasm for this new female poetic vocation. Even if EBB heeded an already changing tide, her figuration of *the* female poet character of the nineteenth century as enthusiastic but decidedly

[75] The now-infamous phrase was coined by Coventry Patmore in 1854. For EBB's interactions with the topic, see Joyce Zonana, "'The Embodied Muse': Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* and Feminist Poetics," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 8.2 (1989): 244, 249; and Cooper, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, 25. For EBB's disdain of Patmore around the time of *Aurora Leigh*'s publication and his negative review of it, see *BC*, 23: 98-100, 103-105; 24: 4-9, 16-18; 25: 271-273.

[76] "enthusiast, n.3a," *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, June 2017, accessed December 5, 2017, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/62880?redirectedFrom=enthusiast.

not an "enthusiast" resonates for years to come. EBB and her contemporaries prove more comfortable with "seer,"[77] and the term's nineteenth-century revival supports her reliance on prophetic-poetic character to form an epic heroine. The decades following *Aurora Leigh*'s publication witness the emergence of two "seer" derivatives: "seercraft" and "seerhood" appear in the 1880s,[78] and they speak to how EBB may have helped shape the term. The "craft" of "seercraft" aligns it with artistry and may replace earlier imputations of "witchcraft" to female enthusiasm; further, "seerhood" suggests an identity attained through such craft. EBB contributes to this Victorian idea of seerhood in part by preserving and reconfiguring the essence of female enthusiasm.

In 1820, Elizabeth Barrett looked inward to contemplate her values as a writer, but she also looked to Romantic conceptions of prophecy, improvisation, and spiritualized poetics of nature; moreover, she used liberally the Romantic term that best embodied this constellation of ideas: enthusiasm. *Aurora Leigh*'s total omission of that term in 1856 thus becomes all the more significant for its early prominence in EBB's writing. Her most iconic heroine and most mature text do not signify outright rejection of EBB's early poetics or of the Romantic-era enthusiasts—male and female—who helped inspire them. Instead, EBB's avoidance of "enthusiasm" shows her reticence to engage with a label that had been compromised by decades of tragic heroines. If Aurora Leigh is to survive and become the quintessential female poet of her age, then she cannot be simply another Euthanasia dei Adimari drowning at sea, or another unnamed *improvisatrice* memorialized in paint, or even another Julia Osborne exiled from society after achieving fame. Instead, Aurora combines Euthanasia's regulatory practices, the Improvisatrice's layered poetic

[77] See Dieleman, *Religious Imaginaries*, 92, 94.

[78] "seer, n.1." *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), accessed November 7, 2017, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/174833?rskey=bMML2g&result=1.

identity, and Julia's determination to write vocationally while avoiding the tragic ends that seem to negate rather than empower women's writing. And if *Aurora Leigh* is to theorize a poetics that allows such a woman to survive in the Victorian age, then it cannot make the same mistakes that these earlier texts make.[79] Instead, EBB's epic must take the female enthusiast's fiery passion, spiritual authority, and verbal eloquence while avoiding the charges of hysteria, heterodoxy, and unprofessionalism that were all too frequently laid against her. Insofar as EBB accomplishes this monumental reconfiguration of feminine poetics, she does so through a development and a maturation of those early impulses to cautiously embrace and carefully regulate the identity that she would claim in some way over her entire career. Enthusiasm was always there, perhaps even more so in the apparent disavowal of her maturity than in the ready proclamations of her youth.

With *Aurora Leigh*, EBB accomplishes for women writers what male Romantic poets had achieved at women's expense half a century earlier: she incorporates the character of enthusiasm into a socially acceptable poetics of feeling by jettisoning compromising traits and associations. Wordsworth had recognized the power of feminine emotionality and had appropriated it into his poetics of "powerful feeling"; P. B. Shelley attempted to claim a prophetic inspiration cleansed from all links to eighteenth-century Methodism and its feminized zeal. These poets and their male contemporaries relocated and renamed what they found empowering in the discourse of enthusiasm, leaving women largely excluded from a professional Romantic sensibility. EBB's epic makes a similar move: she takes stock of past female models and feminine traits in order to create and codify an acceptable enthusiastic poet for the Victorian age; however, she does this as a woman, and she does it *for* women rather than to their professional detriment. This time, it is not a redistricting; it is a redefinition. And that redefinition of enthusiastic female poetics allows

[79] As Cora Kaplan puts it, "Barrett Browning makes damned sure that Aurora, her modern Corinne, survives" (introduction, 84).

EBB, her heroine, and her literary heiresses to assert an inspired, effusive, yet professional model of poetic vocation that survives and thrives in ways their grandmothers could never quite imagine.

FIGURES

Figure 1: Hubert François Bourguignon Gravelot, *Enthusiasm Display'd: Or, The Moor Fields Congregation* (London: C. Corbett, 1739). Library of Congress, PC 1 – 2432.

Figure 2: William Hogarth, *Enthusiasm Delineated* (London, 1760-1762). British Museum, 1858,0417.582.

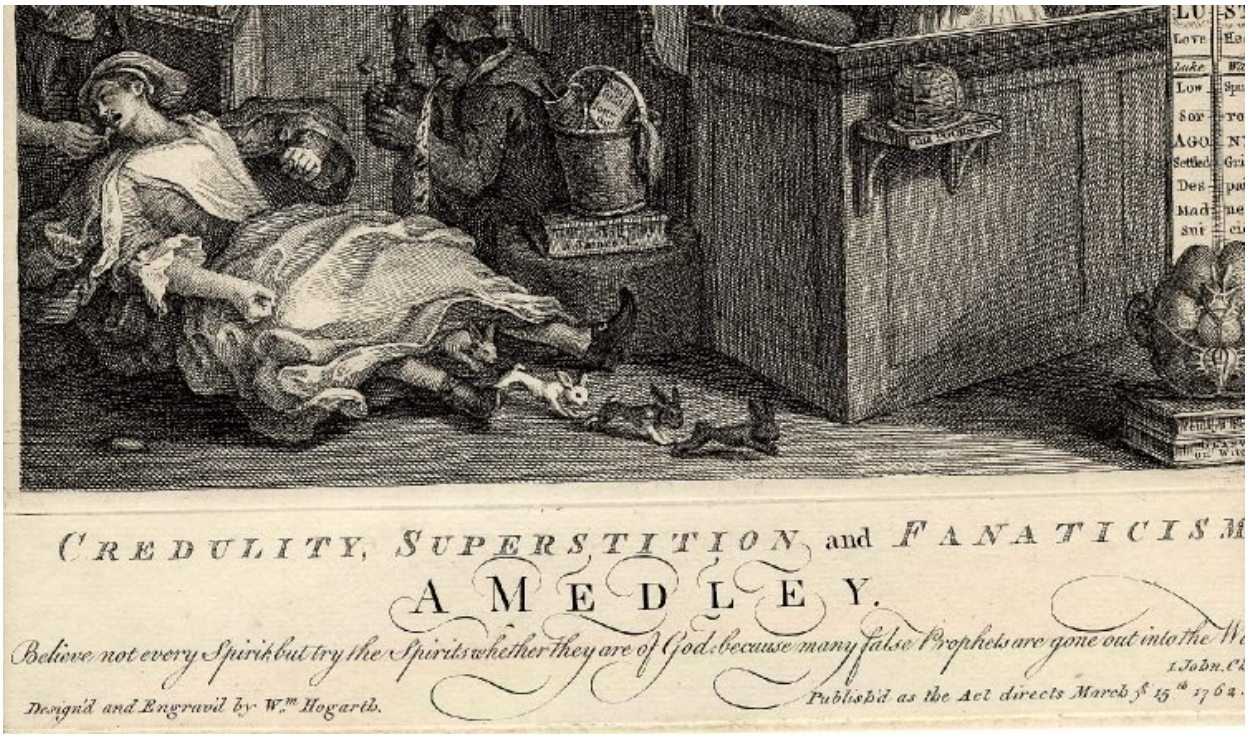

Figure 3: William Hogarth, *Credulity, Superstition, and Fanaticism. A Medley* (London, 1762), Detail. British Museum, 1868,0822.1624.

Figure 4: William Dent, *The French Feast of Reason, or the Cloven-foot Triumphant* (London: James Aitken, 1793). British Museum, 1868,0808.6313

Figure 5: James Gillray, *The Heroic Charlotte La Cordé, upon her trial, ...* (London: Hannah Humphrey, 1793). British Museum, 1868,0808.6304.

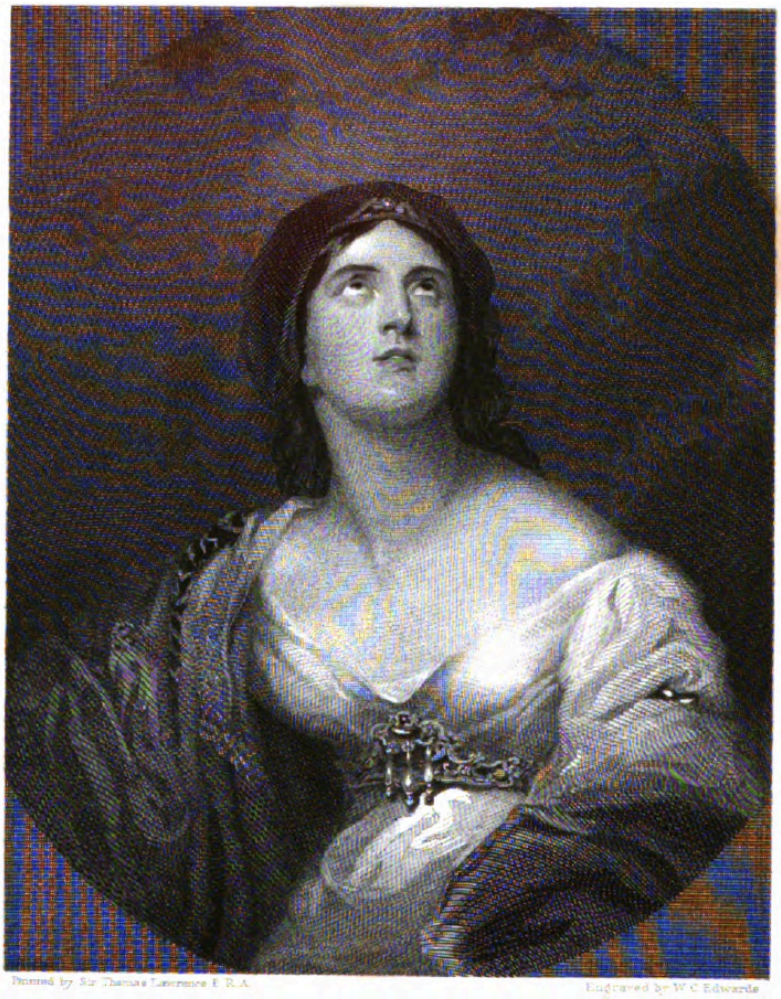

Figure 6: "The Prophetess." In *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap-book.* London: Fisher, Son, &. Co., 1838. *Google Books*. Digitized from Oxford University, 2009. Accessed December 2, 2018. https://books.google.com/books?id=49BbAAAAQAAJ&source=gbs_navlinks_s.

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